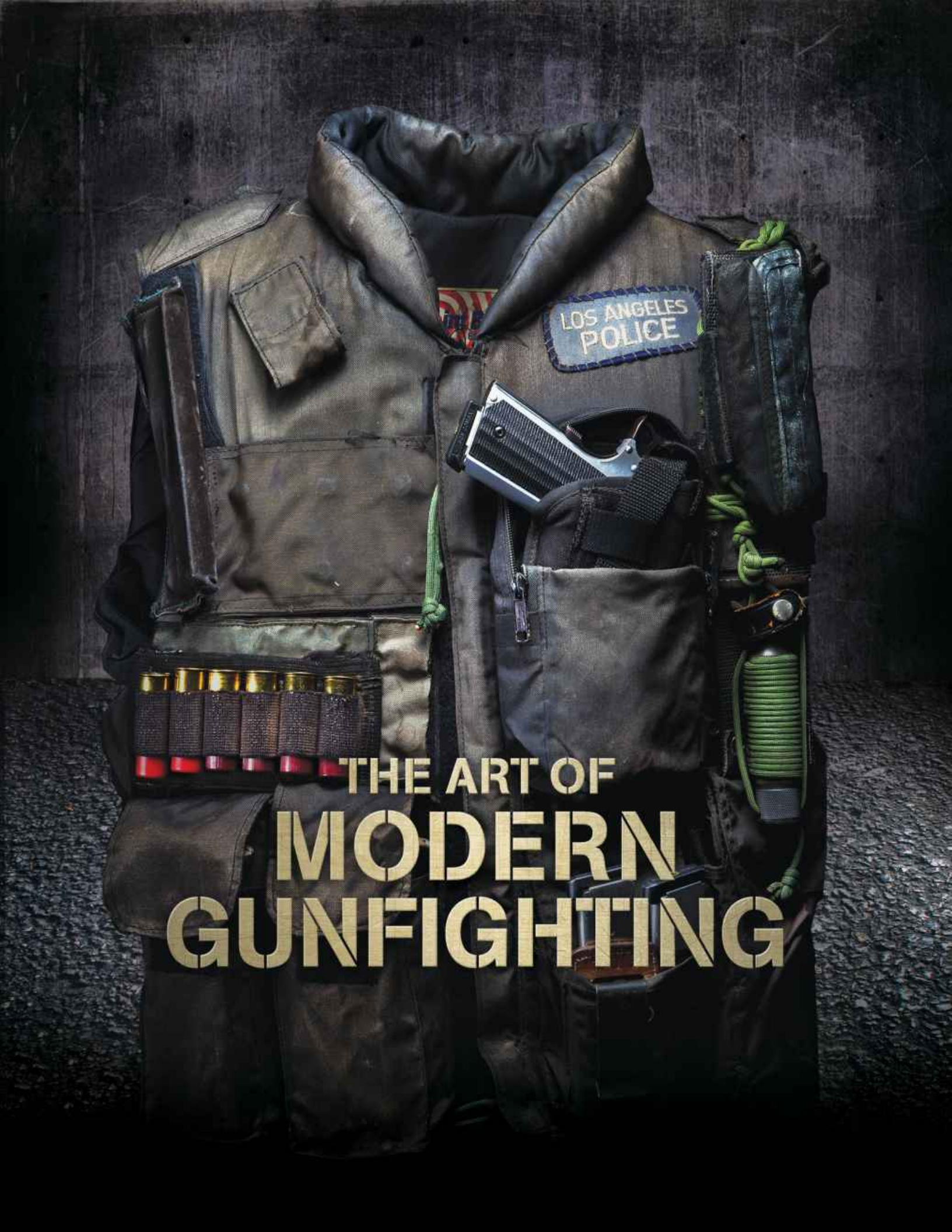



# THE ART OF MODERN GUNFIGHTING

# THE ART OF MODERN GUNFIGHTING
# THE PISTOL: VOLUME 1

SCOTT REITZ
WITH BRETT MCQUEEN

THE ART OF MODERN GUNFIGHTING THE PISTOL: VOLUME 1
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# THE PISTOL: VOLUME 1

SCOTT REITZ
WITH BRETT MCQUEEN

**This book is a ‘supplement’ to training and not intended to serve as a substitute for ‘hands on’ training with a qualified, experienced instructor.**

To my father, Captain Spencer Reitz (U.S.N., Retired) and my mother Barbara Reitz—thank you for the loving and diligent upbringing. You are missed. To our children — we love you. And to my wife, Brett McQueen — thank you for encouraging me on all fronts and making me a better man. It may sound sophomoric, but there it is.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chief Gates was my Chief. Although I served on the L.A.P.D. for three decades under five chiefs, it was Chief Gates under whom I served the longest. He arguably guided the department through the most difficult and revolutionary times it has ever experienced. He was the father of the SWAT concept and made the LAPD a model for police agencies throughout the world. From a department armed with revolvers and straight stick batons, Chief Gates saw it through pioneering concepts such as the introduction of the semi-automatic pistol, less lethal devices, crisis negotiation intervention, the computerization of policing techniques along with many other firsts in law enforcement. It was this foresight coupled with his ability to implement such forward thinking processes that has ‘raised the bar’ on policing techniques worldwide. It was his unwavering dedication to do and say what was right for the rank and file, even if it was not always popular, that made him so well respected. He stood behind us when it counted and I am very proud to have served under him and to have had the opportunity to call him my Chief! He will be greatly missed.

CHIEF
* * * *
A Daryl F. Gates Co.

March 2009

This is a great book and a must read for anyone legally involved in the use of firearms. The dramatic events of Scott Reitz's time in the Los Angeles Police Department's Metropolitan "Metro" Division and his experiences as a member of D Platoon, "SWAT", are vividly told resulting in instructive drama.

We learn and remember best when our attention is held through our own experience, but we broaden our learning through the well told experiences of others. Scott's are well told, almost putting the reader's eyes in the sights of his gun. The quality of the stories is enhanced because Scott has added the dimension of heart in each.

While I pioneered the concept of SWAT and was instrumental in the formation of the first SWAT Team, SWAT today is the result of the combined effort of officers like Scott whose skill, dedication, courage and resourcefulness has made SWAT better year after year.

This book held my attention throughout and reminded me of how much has changed since I learned to shoot one handed, with my arm fully extended. Also I was really good with instinctive shooting and very proud of my skills with both methods, but that was long, long ago.

I and others are not too old to learn the new and better methods when there are guys like Scott willing to teach. This is again a must read for all those in law enforcement.

Daryl F. Gates
Chief of Police, Retired
Los Angeles Police Department



# LAPD ACADEMY—1976-1977



Obstacle Course.



Universal Studios back lot SWAT Survival training.



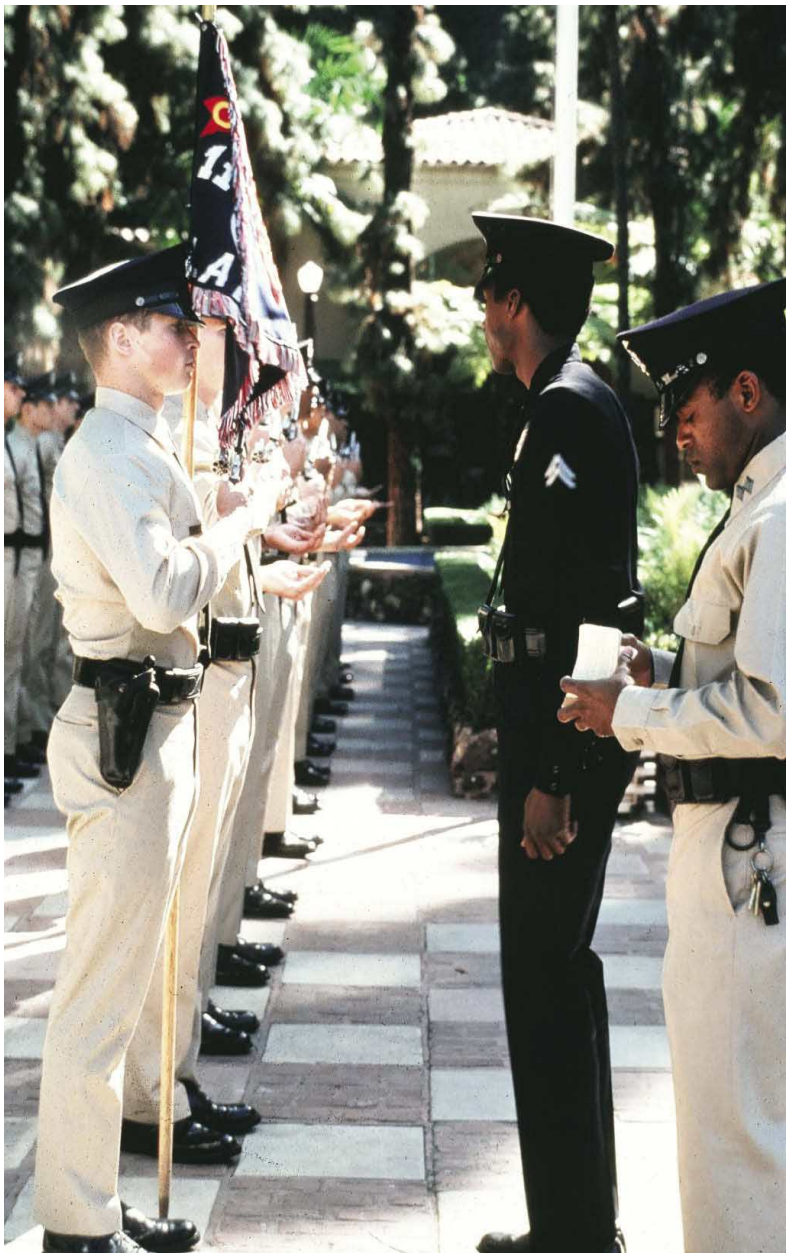
The ever present pull ups.



Class formation.



Class A Inspection prior to graduation.



Revolver inspection.

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# INTRODUCTION

## SCOTT'S PERSPECTIVE

When I became a police officer in 1976, the few worthwhile books on gunfighting were written by men who paid their dues with hard service. Some of their concepts are still valid today, even though legal and situational aspects have radically changed.

This work is not based on conjecture, suppositions, or theory. It is based on the real experiences of myself and others relative to past events. Even as you read this, similar events are occurring.

Certain truths emerge from being involved in tactical situations on a repeated basis through a protracted period of time. Repeating what was learned in a hundred classes does not and never will carry the same validity as firsthand experience. First hand experience is just that—first hand, and its value is incomparable.

There are no masters in gunfighting, only students, and that includes myself. One can perform flawlessly in one instance and in another instance make one or more simple mistakes and everything will breakdown.

This book, the first in a planned series on gunfighting, is the product of thirty-four years of experience. Thirty of those years were with the Los Angeles Police Department with over twenty-six of them in LAPD's elite Metropolitan Division, and ten of those as a member of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT). During this time I personally made thousands of arrests; participated in hundreds of high-risk SWAT call-ups, bank stakeouts, and high risk search-and-arrest warrant services; served on presidential, VIP, and dignitary protection details and served on serial killer details such as the Richard Ramirez 'Nightstalker' and 'Hillside Strangler' cases. I worked closely with and trained various U.S. Special Forces military units such as U.S. Army Delta, SEAL Team 6, U.S. Marine Corps Force Recon S.O.C. M.A.U. & SOTG training unit, and France's G.I.G.N. I was additionally involved in hostage rescues, foot and vehicular suspect pursuits, and was on the front lines during fires, floods, earthquakes and riots. I have trained tens of thousands of police officers and military personnel as well as civilians, both foreign and domestic.

I have used deadly force on a number of occasions. In each instance it was ruled to be well within departmental protocols and the law. None resulted in any type of lawsuit. I have also been present during many officer-involved shootings where others fired shots but I did not. Additionally, hundreds of men and women that I have trained through the years have been involved in shootings. I have testified and consulted as a deadly force and tactics expert in Federal and State Superior courts throughout the U.S. and continue to do so. I defend individuals who have legitimately employed deadly force and must justify their actions to the courts.

What I personally accomplished in the field while serving on the LAPD was one thing. What I accomplish by teaching others is by far more rewarding. Throughout the years I have had countless law enforcement officers, military personnel and civilians tell me that the training they received has saved their lives and careers. Wives and sons and daughters have also thanked me for giving their loved ones the means to prevail in gunfights and return to them whole. What I teach works. It can take a life, but more importantly, it can save one. What you read here is what I have personally experienced and carefully analyzed.

When Brett and I started International Tactical Training Seminars (ITTS) more than twenty years ago, our goal was to impart the most efficient and effective method of training available anywhere to police, military and civilians. If I refer primarily to police incidents and examples, it is simply due to having spent well over half my life as an LAPD officer. But the lessons herein are not just for police officers; they are just as valid for anyone who wants to become more proficient in their skills. What we teach can be used by a soldier in a combat setting, a patrol officer or a homeowner.

This book is the product of a lifelong journey that has taken me into many dark places. I have come away from these experiences with profound lessons learned.

*Note: In volume two of the pistol, I will discuss in greater detail, my experiences on the LAPD.*

## BRETT'S PERSPECTIVE

### The Importance of Training

Buying a gun for the first time is always confusing and stressful. If you are a civilian, you might not have ever held a gun before but believe that it is a good idea for home protection. If you are in law enforcement or the military that process is already done for you. You will be given training through your department or the military. But sometimes the training provided for you is sub-standard and barely covers material that will help keep you alive. We have seen this time and again when training police and military personnel. Proper training is important for everyone who possesses a firearm, but absolutely imperative for law enforcement and military professionals whose very existence depends on it. Gun owners need to understand the deadly force continuum whether they are civilians, police officers or soldiers.

For civilians, it is not enough to simply go out and purchase a gun and assume that if the situation presents itself, you will know what to do. Too many things can go sideways. In my opinion, unless you are willing to put the time and practice into learning how to operate a firearm safely and legally and keep it away from unattended children, you should not buy one. When you register for a class at ITTS for the first time, unless you are law enforcement or military or have had equivalent training from another school, you must start with Defensive Handgun I. In this class we stress the importance of safety under all circumstances, understanding when you can and cannot use deadly force, situational awareness, trends in crime, handgun selection (some students have not yet purchased a gun when they come to this class), safe storage of firearms, setting up a safe room, having a plan for emergencies and much more. Then we go into the three 'M's—marksmanship, manipulation and mindset. On day two we cover the basic elements of shooting on both paper and steel and we even have you shooting on steel targets at 50 yards by the middle of the day. We set the foundation for learning how to safely and effectively operate a firearm so that you can move to the next level of training and can practice on your own.

Shooting is a perishable skill and without practice, you will forget what you have learned in a short period of time unless you repeat the

process several times. Therefore, we give all our basic students an ITTS DVD which they watch at home before the class and we encourage them to review from time to time. Reading this book and watching the DVD are very effective tools to *supplement* the training. However be advised that reading books and watching DVDs is no substitute for *hands on* training and should never be used as such. Giving you the skills to make your own corrections is absolutely essential to being a good trainer. We also teach students to read their own targets and make the necessary corrections when they are shooting on their own.

Unlike most civilians, police officers are often restricted as to what kind of weapons they can carry, whether or not they can have their firearms altered in any way to make them easier to operate and even if they can put night sights on their guns. We can make recommendations to them, but ultimately they are required to abide by their department's policies. Putting strict limitations on these officers by sometimes misguided department regulations can put them at a great tactical disadvantage. It is not unusual for us to come across departments where firearms training is actually discouraged! The reasoning (if one can call it that) behind this argument is that if an officer is well-trained with his/her firearm, he/she may be more likely to get into a shooting. This is seriously flawed thinking. The fact is that the better trained an officer is the more likely he/she is to make appropriate decisions and apply them accordingly. The more an officer trains, the better prepared he/she is to respond with aforethought and effectiveness and less likely to get into an out of policy shooting. We have seen this time and time again.

We feel very fortunate that to our knowledge none of our students, both civilian and law enforcement, have ever gotten into a 'bad' shooting. We have had hundreds of police officers who have used deadly force or have averted having to use deadly force when faced with a rapidly evolving threat. We have had civilian students who have been in shootings and have used only the amount of deadly force necessary to stop the threat. In every class we teach, the use of deadly force is addressed and covered thoroughly. Our philosophy is that it is not enough to teach someone how to shoot. They need to know when or when *not* to shoot.

**The ITTS Philosophy**

When Scott and I decided to open a firearms school 20 years ago there were only a handful of them around. That has changed drastically over the last few years. Firearms training has become a cottage industry with new schools popping up everyday. Many instructors work at other jobs during the week and teach shooting on the weekends. We do not. We teach firearms and tactics full time.

We have developed a curriculum based on real world scenarios and have a training method which allows us to get students up to speed in a very short time. Safety is strictly enforced on our ranges and we have an unblemished safety record. Everything we teach has been tested by those whose very survival depends on implementing the most up-to-date techniques and prevailing in deadly force encounters. Once our students reach a certain level of training, our goal is to get them to think 'outside the box' with problem solving scenarios and simulations of actual gunfights. We hold ourselves and our students to the highest standards because our students' success is our success.

Our level of instruction is what has gained ITTS international recognition as a firearms and tactics school. All of our instructors have been handpicked by us because they have performed exceptionally well in their field and have impeccable credentials. They are all certified instructors from their elite police or military agencies and all have experienced combat/deadly force situations firsthand. Their ability to articulate clear and effective subject matter and their dedication to our students is unparalleled.

Whether you are a first-time shooter or an experienced operator, we hope that you will come and visit us at ITTS!

# SECTION I
# THE SHOOTINGS

While I was with the LAPD there were many times I could have employed deadly force but did not. When I did, it was the very last viable option available to me at the time. In the following narratives I describe incidents where the use of deadly force was unavoidable.

— Scott Reitz

## THE FIRST SHOOTING

'Rock' cocaine had reached epidemic proportions in the 1980's in Los Angeles. From a criminal viewpoint it was an extremely lucrative trade, and so-called 'rock houses' had sprung up all over the city. Initially they were standard rented, commandeered or abandoned houses taken over by gang members and used to purvey their commodities. As the LAPD became more sophisticated in executing search warrants, rock dealers began fortifying the structures.

Steel mesh doors were a common first barrier, but we adopted the technique of pulling them down with thick nylon ropes and massive hooks thrust into the door itself. Then double steel doors appeared so we went in through the windows with specially designed ladders that we designed and built ourselves. When they began to place steel cages and mesh around the windows we went through the doors again, this time with a long battering ram affixed to the front of an armored personnel carrier. The dealers responded by constructing a steel cage that extended into the house with one steel door in front and a secondary steel door deep inside the house. So we used a longer ram. Sometimes we resorted to explosives to breach doors or walls in order to gain entry. This was somewhat exciting because we never knew just how much to use, and occasionally we got a much, much bigger bang than we bargained for. When the dealers moved to second story operations, we devised a vertically movable platform affixed to a heavy duty truck that placed entry teams at the proper height. There was sometimes an additional element of excitement depending upon the truck driver.

Sometimes rock cocaine dealers resorted to a simple method of protecting their products: arming themselves in order to shoot it out with anyone trying to interfere with their business.

The warrant that led to my shooting was executed in the very early morning hours on a rock house in South Central LA, a location where we had served warrants before. SWAT members are cross-trained to function in different positions on a team, and often perform different jobs from one warrant service to the next. My responsibility on this particular warrant service was to 'freeze down' and control anyone on the porch of the house, which was elevated above lawn level and encircled with steel railing. The

observation post for this warrant was manned by undercover narcotics officers stationed across the street in an undercover vehicle. They had not seen any alarming activity on the porch other than the usual buyers coming and going throughout the day.

My partner and I were assigned to control any suspects lingering outside the house and since shoulder-fired weapons such as shotguns or the MP-5 submachine guns would impair our ability to physically control such individuals, we were armed with our model 1911 Colt .45 caliber pistols and handheld SL-20 Streamlight flashlights. Sitting on the open tailgate of the dual rear wheel heavy-duty truck that carried our pull rope and massive steel door hooks, we would be leading as the truck backed into position, after which we would get off the truck and cover the other members of the 30-plus member entry team as they dismounted, ran rearward, and set the door hooks. While everyone stood clear and the door pull was executed, my partner and I would cover any suspects positioned to the front of the house.

As we turned the corner approximately 100 yards south of the targeted location, the observation team radioed that there were now three armed men on the front porch. Although I didn't realize it at the time, when we received this broadcast I immediately conducted another chamber check and set myself into a solid Harries flashlight/pistol grip. This fact was later relayed to me by a team member driving behind us and illustrates how training automatically takes over during stressful situations.

As we approached the house my heart was racing and I started to breathe deeply. My hands were joined together in the Harries flashlight/handgun technique, which was difficult to maintain due to the constrictive Level III body armor I wore. At that time we had neither pistol-mounted lights nor compact high-intensity flashlights that SureFire and other companies would later perfect, so we had to perform the Harries technique with fairly large aluminum-body flashlights. In this method, the firing hand holds the pistol in a normal grip and the support hand holds the flashlight with the light-emitting end positioned to the front of the little finger side of the support hand. The wrists are crossed over one another with the gun hand placed atop the firing support hand while the backs of both hands are pressed hard against each other, providing a fairly steady firing platform. Done properly, the Harries technique position is uncomfortable and fatiguing, but with body armor cutting into your biceps

it’s worse. Adding to my handicaps was the sheer weight of the armor and the rest of my SWAT gear, which totaled about 57 pounds.

My position on the truck tailgate put me on the same side of the street of the targeted house, and I didn’t want to be sitting there fully exposed should someone start shooting at us. I turned and watched the house come into view, then jumped off the tailgate near the property line to avoid being in anyone’s direct field of fire. Slowing myself down from the truck’s 12 mile per hour speed, I came around the left edge of a large tree in a low ready position maintaining a ‘shooting on the move’ body configuration and movement.

On the elevated porch, the leftmost armed man moved to my right and ducked into the house through the front door. The armed man on the right ran to my left and rapidly descended the steps at the end. The middle individual raised a shoulder-fired weapon and aimed it at the entry team advancing across the adjacent lawns to my right. He was running from my right to my left. While still on the move I raised my pistol and simultaneously activated my flashlight, tracking him as he moved leftward, above me and about fifteen yards distant. I instantly set the sights on the center of his chest tracked, and fired a single shot, continually tracking him as I advanced, and he disappeared as if a trap door had sprung open beneath him.

The entry team went into the house and carried out their tasks while other officers surrounded and controlled the suspect I had shot. He had been armed with a Ruger Mini-14, which shoots .223 Remington cartridges, virtually identical to those used in the M16 rifle. There was a round in the chamber and a fully loaded 40-round steel magazine locked and seated in the magazine well. The .45 round I fired had struck the front edge of this magazine—positioned at the center of his chest as he aimed at the entry team—then deflected upward, entered center into the suspect’s jaw, transited to the left rear side of his head, and exited. Lying on the porch, the suspect seemed disoriented and confused by the surrounding activity and by our interest in him, and was unaware that he had been shot despite the severity of his wound. He survived to serve an extremely lengthy prison term.

The elapsed time from the moment I first observed this suspect raising his rifle until I fired my shot was perhaps two seconds. I had been

on the move, at night, engaging a moving armed target with a flashlight technique that we had practiced extensively in SWAT. At that time I had about eleven years on the streets. I had held many, many suspects at gunpoint prior to this night, yet I had never found it necessary to fire. I had observed other officers use deadly force in the field but this was the first time that I personally had done so. The officer involved shooting (OIS) investigation lasted many hours, and I relived the night's events over and over in my mind during the coming days.

Much had gone on during those few seconds. Despite added difficulties—low-light conditions, deploying from the back of a moving vehicle and checking my speed, shooting on the move while using a flashlight technique, and shooting at a moving target—I was able to properly align my sights, smoothly press the trigger, and incorporate follow-through. This would never have been possible without a sound grounding in pistol fundamentals and extensive training through the years. They had come through when it counted, enabling me to successfully resolve this incident.

## THE SECOND SHOOTING

Exactly one week after the rock house incident, we were conducting training on our range and discussing my recent shooting and attempting to replicate it on a moving target system when we received a SWAT call-up in the Rampart area. The exact location was an old brick apartment building on a side street west of the Harbor freeway not far from the Los Angeles Music Center—officially the Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County—in downtown Los Angeles. A male individual had slashed his sister repeatedly with a large butcher knife, and although she had been rescued by the initial responding officers the man had barricaded himself within the ground level apartment and refused to come out.

Because we had been training most of the day we were fairly exhausted when we arrived. When negotiations failed we deployed tear gas inside his unit, but the suspect threw the gas canisters out as fast as we could throw them in. After a time, however, he ceased throwing them out and retreated to an unknown area of the apartment. We continued our attempts at negotiations but received no response and therefore were forced to resort to entry.

The entry team consisted of myself and three others, one of which was our team leader, referred to as a ‘three plus one.’ Wearing Level III body armor and gas masks, we staged ourselves in the hallway just outside of the apartment. Physically, things were not ideal. We had been wearing our gas masks for many hours and the lenses were intermittently fogging up. When you exhaled they would fog and when you inhaled they would clear as the purge valve clicked on and off. The sweat on our necks increased the burning effect of the tear gas on the exposed skin, and sweat under the masks ran into our eyes. The heavy body armor was not only hot, it also strained our lower backs due to the flashlight low ready position with our pistols which we had assumed in case the suspect charged out unexpectedly.

Finally, the decision was made to make entry through the front door. This is always a nerve-wracking experience. You don’t know exactly where the suspect is, you don’t know his intent, and you don’t fully know his capabilities. In this case we knew the suspect had used a knife on the victim, but we didn’t know if he had a firearm, and if so what type and

caliber it was, or what his tactical/shooting skills were. There are always more questions than answers in such situations. And hanging over everything was the pervasive concern over making a wrong decision that got yourself or your partners injured or killed, or resulted in some unknown other person in the building being injured or killed.

The apartment door was breached and the initial entry was executed without incident. It was a small unit, cluttered and very dimly lit. There was no sign of the suspect but we knew he was somewhere inside. Not good. My partner and I moved to a hallway that, we would soon learn, led to a closet and a bathroom. The hallway was so narrow that we had to advance single file, me leading since I was shorter. Piles of clothes and debris on the floor made our footing extremely unsure and we moved very, very slowly, not making a single sound. We advanced at the low ready position with our pistols and flashlights positioned in the Harries technique, and halted just short of the bathroom door.

My arms began to ache, my back and chest muscles began to cramp, my lower back muscles burned, and sweat cascaded down my chest and back. I blinked rapidly, trying to clear the sweat rolling into my eyes. We waited and listened in silence as the purge valve on the gas mask faintly clicked open and closed with each breath. We heard the suspect moving in the bathroom, and then we heard the other two SWAT team members attempt to negotiate with him through the wall on the opposite side of the apartment. The suspect was non-responsive.

After a time, the other officers decided to sledgehammer a hole in the bathroom wall opposite our position, toss in another tear gas canister, and hold a section of plywood over the hole to prevent the suspect from throwing the canister out or from reaching through and stabbing them. Of course if he had a firearm the plywood would offer little protection. When the first sledge hammer blows reverberated through the apartment, the bathroom door suddenly opened with a single violent motion and the suspect immediately charged out and slashed at me with the butcher knife. I jerked my head back and the knife blade crossed past my throat just above my body armor. I instantaneously fired a single shot when my sights were aligned, the round entering the left side of the suspect’s chest and exiting the right side. He angled away from me for a fraction of a second and then lunged again, this time screaming as he slashed once more. My partner fired

over my shoulder and wood splinters flew from the door frame as I centered the sights on his head and fired, striking him again. He fell instantly and expired on scene.

We covered the downed suspect in silence, as smoke and debris floated in the hallway illuminated only by our flashlight beams. I was now involved in a second OIS. Both had occurred during SWAT-related missions, but in more than eleven years I had been on many, many previous missions in which I did not fire a shot. Now I had been involved in two shootings in one week almost to the hour. It was unbelievable, yet it also carried a valuable lesson. Deadly-force incidents can occur on any mission, at any time interval. There is no pattern to shootings, there is no calendar, no syllabus, no forewarning and sometimes there is no indication that you are about to ‘get into it’.

From my decision to shoot to resolution, I would estimate that this incident took two seconds at most. Again, the basics had been in place when my life and my partner’s life depended on them. The sights, the trigger press, and the follow-through had proven themselves in this situation, just as they had on the range. I had to overcome an awkward position in the hallway, physical and mental fatigue following a full day of training, heavy and constricting body armor, a restricting and vision-impairing gas mask, and a low-light environment, all while employing a very demanding flashlight/handgun technique for an extended period of time. The suspect moved extremely rapidly and presented his body at unusual angles. Had the basics not been solidly in place, I doubt that I or my partner would have escaped severe injury or worse.

## THE THIRD SHOOTING

It was some time before my next OIS. My SWAT partner and I had just finished Code 7 (lunch/dinner in LAPD speak). It was the middle of the day and we were driving towards Metropolitan Division, located in the Central Facilities building at 5th and Wall Street in downtown Los Angeles, right in the heart of skid row.

We were both in uniform in an unmarked yet readily recognized Metro police vehicle (referred to as a 'plain wrap.'). I was driving westbound on 5th, and as we approached the south-east corner at San Julian Street we saw several dozen people standing on the corner and spilling into the street. My partner and I then observed a male individual stabbing another male individual repeatedly. We both responded without a word to one another.

When you are fortunate enough to have the same partner for an extended period of time you learn to operate efficiently together with a minimum of communication, which is a tremendous tactical advantage. I instantly placed the vehicle in park and simultaneously exited the vehicle in the same motion as my partner, who came around from the rear of the vehicle shouted "Police—freeze!" I shouted the exact same command as I closed the distance and drew my Colt .45 1911 while on the move.

The crowd began running in all directions, but the suspect continued to slash and stab at his victim so my partner fired two shots while moving toward him. When the suspect still refused to comply with our demands, my partner fired two more shots while still on the move and I fired a single shot center chest while on the move. Between my partner and I three rounds had struck the suspect in his chest area—virtually simultaneously. He instantly fell against the wall and slid down, and just stared at us.

There was an absolute silence on the street for several seconds as my partner broadcast our location while I covered the downed assailant at a low ready position. Everyone else had cleared out of the area. Vehicles from Metro arrived quickly since they were only blocks away, and the area was cordoned off. The assailant expired on the scene.

Here was yet another incident that appeared out of the blue and transpired within a few seconds. We happened on it by chance, suddenly going from a post-lunch mid-day ride toward Metro to a deadly force

scenario. There was no foreshadowing of things to come, there was no warning—nothing. We had simply stumbled on an ‘assault-in-progress’ through no fault of our own. My partner and I had reacted as we trained, responding instantly with no communication between us. In the end there was no time for anything except application of deadly force—no time for dialogue, pain compliance, or less-lethal options. We had both fired while moving after a rapid vehicle exit, and both of us were mindful of what was beyond and to the sides of the suspect. Had we not acted when we did, as we did, the victim may well have been killed instead of severely cut.

Once again the basics had been applied by both my partner and myself. There is no time in such circumstances for warming up or a review of skill sets. What needs to be there had better be there or it simply won’t go well.

## THE FOURTH SHOOTING

My fourth OIS occurred a few years after the knife attack incident in South Central Los Angeles, during another SWAT rock house warrant service. The house was an old Victorian-style structure that had been under observation by an undercover narcotics team positioned across the street earlier in the day. They had observed heavy activity that lasted well into the evening, including one individual in particular who had been seen several times brandishing a shotgun and threatening the neighboring residents.

In the dark early morning hours our teams approached in SUVs and other vehicles. My vehicle stopped short of the house and our primary entry team dismounted and rapidly approached the house while a containment team approached from the rear.

I was armed with a Benelli 12 gauge shotgun loaded with 00 shot and fitted with a Streamlight SL-20 flashlight attached to the fore end with an aluminum base plate and hose clamps. Once through the front door, the main body of the primary team went center and right inside the house, heading toward multiple suspects that had been observed upon entry. I was the last man to enter, following another team member who went left through the dining room, then through another small anteroom, and finally into the kitchen. In the kitchen we found ourselves confronting two suspects about eight to ten feet away. A powerfully built male suspect (a ‘joint build’ in police jargon) was seated with his legs folded underneath him with his back to a refrigerator. A female was similarly seated just left of the male suspect leaning against him. Directly in front of them was a push cart loaded with rock cocaine in aluminum foil bindles and cash stacked on the built-in shelves. To the male suspect’s right, lay a sawed-off double barreled 12 gauge shotgun with the stock cut off and the pistol grip wrapped in white athletic tape.

My partner and I both shouted commands at these individuals, at which time my partner reached toward the push cart to roll it out of the way since it partially obscured our view. As he did this, the seated male suspect suddenly turned to his right and grabbed the shotgun on the floor, and I responded by bringing my own shotgun to bear directly on him. When the suspect started to swing the firearm toward us I fired a single shot which struck his left arm just under his shoulder resulting in an instant amputation

just under the shoulder. I had only been presented with his left side when he had turned to his right. The rest of the charge continued into his chest. Despite the severity of his wound he continued to come around with the shotgun and I immediately shifted my point of aim and fired again. This round struck between his eyes and he expired on the scene.

As a general rule for entries, the first men in assume the most risk and are more likely to be involved in a confrontation. In this situation, my partner and I entered last and went to the side where no apparent activity was taking place—yet I was the one who ended up in an OIS. The suspect had ignored repeated commands from two armed officers with guns trained on him; common sense and self-preservation should have made him totally compliant, yet he was not. He then suffered an initial devastating wound but this did not deter his action towards us. Again, realistic training and the basics, enabled me to react instantly and accurately with a minimum of rounds fired. The basics had been in place when needed, allowing me to avoid the non-threatening female seated directly next to the suspect.

These facts reinforced certain lessons. First, don't assume that one entry team position is safer than another. Second, don't assume you know where the actual danger lies. Third, don't assume you know how a suspect will react to being shot. Fourth, realistic training works.

This lesson regarding reactions of suspects to being shot would be reinforced many times over the years as I studied wound ballistics. It is an imperfect science and reactions can literally run the gamut. A 12 gauge shotgun firing a full load of size 00 (.32 caliber) shot is considered an extremely effective load for stopping an aggressive suspect, yet a close-range chest-centered hit had not in this particular case.

An addendum to this incident: Certain basic pistol shooting skills apply directly to other weapons. Sight alignment, trigger press, and follow-through will all be in evidence with any skilled shooter. The grip, stance, sight system, and manipulation can vary depending on the weapon, but the basics will always be present with a proficient marksman. The pistol is arguably the most difficult of all the weapons systems to learn to use effectively. It is steadied by two hands alone (sometimes just one), and has a short sight radius (the distance between the front and rear sights), which is less forgiving of error than a longer sight radius. The pistol is also more readily affected by an improper trigger press, and follow-through can be

very critical on subsequent shots. However, there is a plus: once a shooter learns to utilize a pistol effectively, learning to shoot other firearms—carbine rifles, battle rifles, sniper rifles, shotguns, and submachine guns—will be considerably easier. The shooting mechanics will always remain the same only the weapon system itself will change.

## THE FIFTH SHOOTING

*(The LA Riots of 1992)*

Much of the world has heard of the riots that occurred in Los Angeles, California subsequent to the Rodney King trial verdict. I had conducted Metro Division range training earlier that day, but by late afternoon all of Metro was placed on standby pending the verdict in anticipation of possible public reaction.

I had just arrived home when the beating of truck driver Reginald Denny and further chaos began to unfold around the intersection of Florence and Normandie Avenues, which was being broadcast live on television. Then my phone rang. I was ordered to Code Alpha at 114 Code Two – which meant meet as soon as humanly possible at Metro Division without delay. This meant that I was to proceed to Metropolitan Division located at 5th and Wall in downtown Los Angeles as soon as is humanly possible without using running lights or sirens. I moved quickly while making sure that my children were secure at home. No one knew how big this might become or how far it might spread, but I knew that if things got as bad as the 1965 riots in the LA residential district of Watts I might not be back home for some time.

I raced south down the 405 Freeway (San Diego Freeway) which was noticeably light on traffic—only a handful of cars on one of the busiest freeways in the world, which was not a good sign. I transitioned eastbound on the 10 Freeway (the Santa Monica Freeway) and after going some distance I passed several abandoned and burning cars on the shoulders of the freeway. More shocking was the view to the south. Along the freeway to the south and farther out, as far as I could see from west to east, scores of large fires were burning in the dwindling light. There was no wind, so thick columns of smoke rose almost vertically, reached an inversion layer, and spread out in large flat sections that hung motionless several hundred feet up. The bottoms of these smoke clouds were illuminated in yellow and orange hues from the flames below. It was a scene reminiscent of a Hollywood catastrophe film, utterly surrealistic. With no police vehicles, no fire battalions, and no air support in evidence, I felt alone in my race down to Metro.

I pulled into Metro on the second level of the Central Facilities Station just as a white Metro van pulled alongside me. The few Metro officers in the van yelled for me to get in. I grabbed all my gear and threw it into the van, and we raced out of the station. As we careened down the surface streets towards the command post at 26th and Van Ness, I changed clothes, put on my armor, and checked my weapons as we were thrown around in the back of the van.

No one said much as we drove. The number of fires had increased since I had first observed them from the freeway. In large sections of the city the electricity was off because suspects had been shooting out electrical transformers and shorting out power stations. There were no street lights to speak of, no residential lights, no store front lights no billboard lights-nothing. Adding to the confusion the police radio traffic was filled with shooting calls, officer needs assistance calls, officer needs help calls, LAFD fire calls, shots fired calls, and ambulance calls, making it almost impossible to communicate. We could hear gunshots echoing all around us as we continued through the streets. At one point a woman charged the van and struck it repeatedly with a machete. It was pure bedlam, something none of us had experienced before, escalating from my idea of a riot into something more akin to urban warfare. I recall thinking that if we got through this unscathed it would be nothing short of a miracle.

We pulled into the LAPD emergency command post, which was packed with police, fire and rescue personnel from throughout the city, everyone trying to grasp the scope and nature of what was unfolding on the streets outside. All available channels on the police radios were issuing emergency broadcasts, most of which were going unanswered for the moment. Our group had not been on station for more than ten minutes when a Metro Lieutenant Mike Hillmann, who had inspired me so many years ago during SWAT training at Universal Studios, approached us and said that an LAFD fire truck had been attacked at 114th and Central Avenue, one of the firefighters had been shot, and they were requesting help.

Within moments we had formed a hasty TSE (Tactical Squad Element), loaded up and were speeding toward the location. There were eleven of us in three Metro vehicles. We had all the windows down and our rifle and shotgun barrels protruded out the windows as we raced through the streets. We had been at the command post for less than ten minutes.

Gunshots constantly rang out around us and we could not discern whether they were being specifically fired at us or not. At that time, I had just departed SWAT and the rest of Metro division was not issued Level III body armor. We simply threw Vietnam-era body armor over our standard body armor and hoped for the best.

Approaching 114th Street from the south on Central Avenue, we could see the abandoned red and white LAFD engine ladder parked at an angle in the middle of the intersection, hoses strewn about the vehicle and no firefighters in sight. The first Metro car in our TSE went straight towards the southeast corner of the intersection, and our Metro vehicle—with me riding in the front passenger seat—pulled in directly behind them. Gunfire immediately erupted all around us, most of it coming from the housing projects located directly to the right—that is, east—of the direction our car was facing.

This was not the typical pistol, shotgun or .22 caliber fire that was often directed at us in South Central. This was high powered rifle fire. We were to later discover that early in the riots looters had broken into a local surplus store and had stolen all the AK and SKS semi-automatic rifles, which fired a .30 caliber rifle cartridge. They had also stolen hundreds of magazines and cases of ammunition, which they had been loading and shooting for hours prior to our arrival.

As I quickly opened the passenger door of the Metro vehicle during the barrage of rifle rounds I heard the unmistakable super-sonic crack of a rifle round passing near my head and the simultaneous sound of our Metro ride's back window blowing out. Apparently the round had missed me, traversed the car, and then passed through the back window. Whether it was a ricochet or an aimed round, I couldn't say, but I do know that I moved very quickly. Murphy's Law was in full effect on this night—we had managed to park directly underneath the only fully functioning streetlight in the area. I exited the vehicle, wheeled around and aimed upward, and fired two loads of, 00 buckshot from my Remington 870 shotgun. Both rounds hit center of the light, which fizzled and then went out, which is when things became very interesting.

The instant the street light was extinguished, dozens of rifle rounds began to impact around us, ricocheting off our cars, the street, the sidewalk, and the small establishment we had stopped next to called Sam's

Barbershop. The volume of fire coming from the darkened projects to the east of us was so intense that it sounded like a sound loop from Vietnam War footage. Whoever was firing at us knew our location but there were simply too many of them to keep track of. We could see muzzle flashes emanating from within the projects and from farther down Central Avenue. We immediately set up a perimeter to cover the areas where we were exposed to incoming gunfire, which was pretty much in every direction. From time to time rounds came from several blocks away, yet the shooters were so fleeting in their attacks that we couldn't successfully engage them.

We did not know it at the time but our situation was to remain the same for over an hour and a half. Several times during the incident a female walked out from the projects on 114th Street, looked over at us, then calmly walked back into the projects. Within a minute of her appearances the gunfire would resume in full force and rounds would impact nearby again. She was obviously relaying our location to shooters within the projects who were then in turn shooting at us.

A real problem for us was lack of rifle optics. At that time only SWAT was allowed to mount scopes on their rifles. This policy was due to bureaucratic fear that the SWAT sniper role would be usurped by other officers. It was a flawed policy, not well thought out, and had more to do with ignorance rather than anything else. However, in the LAPD policy was policy and that was that. So we were stuck with regular iron rifle sights that we couldn't use because there was very little ambient light. Even if we had been able to use them we were still unable to discern who was armed and who was not. We were well aware that there were many children and uninvolved parties in the area, which greatly compounded the problem. They could indiscriminately fire at us but we could not return fire.

We finally managed to get two of our eleven-man team positioned to the north of 114th Street, where they deployed from the roof of a church located on the northeast corner. Somehow they had appropriately equipped one of their rifles with a scope, and from their vantage point on the roof they put down several shooters. This caused the incoming rifle fire to trail off. Shots still rang out across the city in the distance, fires blazed everywhere and it seemed that Los Angeles had truly been transformed into a war zone, but our engagement was essentially over. We had been at the location for an hour and forty-five minutes. An armored personnel carrier

came in and recovered the shooters' bodies from the location. Our TSE followed the armored carrier back to the command post and the bodies were placed on the deck, tagged simply Metro–114 and Central. To this day I don't know what happened to that Fire Department ladder company.

The next day the officers who took part in the incident did an OIS walk-through on-site, which was a rapid recorded interview in which we all described what had transpired. Later we learned that the people shooting at us had removed car doors and placed them on the roof of the laundry room adjoining the Jordan Downs apartment complex. The space between the car doors and the taller apartment building created a small shooting port from which they had engaged us—pretty clever for gang members. Investigators later counted 173 rifle impacts in the buildings, sidewalks and cars at the location where we stopped. It was a miracle that none of us had been struck despite all the incoming fire. Looking back on the event, I can say that none of us at 114th and Central had made or acted upon incorrect decisions despite intense incoming fire and frustration. As a footnote, LAPD patrol rifles are now equipped with ACOG scopes.

Few police officers got enough sleep over the next few days. I certainly didn't. We were allowed to go back home for a few hours and then had to redeploy. When I arrived at the command post on the second night the chaos was marginally less than before, although the number of emergency personnel had easily doubled. Again, Lieutenant Mike Hillman of Metro approached the group of us assembled as a TSE, now sixteen in number, and told us that we were needed in the streets. Only ten minutes after our initial arrival at the command post we were driving away in four Metro vehicles, heading northbound on Western Avenue.

Unknown to us, two armed men had attempted to rob a Shell gas station on the southeast corner of Western and Vernon, which was in the direction we were heading. The owner of the Shell station was an elderly World War II veteran who would have none of it, and he so informed the would-be robbers while displaying his WWII .45 caliber 1911 government-issue pistol. The two men departed the Shell station and, seeing the approaching headlights of our Metro vehicles, must have figured that we were an easy mark for carjacking. This was a bad mistake.

Each of our Metro vehicles held four officers, and I was again in the second car as a passenger officer in the front seat. Our rifle barrels

protruded through the open windows, but apparently the would-be robbers couldn't see them because our oncoming headlights blinded them to this fact. As we neared the two men, they turned toward our slow-moving lead vehicle and raised their weapons. The officers in the lead car immediately engaged them and both men went down. We deployed from our vehicles, established a perimeter, and listened to gunfire echoing throughout the city while waiting for a recovery team. One suspect expired on the scene while the second sustained gunshot wounds.

It was all very difficult to absorb. We had been at the command post for less than twenty minutes in the last two days. Each time we departed the CP we had been involved in a shooting within minutes. Buildings and vehicles burned to the ground completely unchecked. All emergency service personnel were apparently considered fair game to be indiscriminately fired upon. All of us reeked of smoke from burning gasoline, oil, wood, rubber, garbage, and plastic. You could literally wipe black grime from any exposed skin after a few hours out on the streets. You could not only smell the smoke, you could taste it as well. The odors seeped into our armor and clothes. When we sweated under the constricting body armor, the acrid smell permeated everything. We slept on or in our Metro rides or on the sidewalks at the command post. We responded instantly to calls for help or shots fired incidents and then returned to the CP and slept again whenever we could.

Whenever we received incoming fire while out on the streets, we rapidly deployed from the vehicles and searched out the shooters, sometimes working our way through buildings that still burned or smoldered. Our clothes and armor and weapons were soon torn and filthy from all the rubble. Sometimes, generally at night, we confronted large crowds that had gathered for unknown reasons, and on occasion someone within the crowd would fire on us. Since this occurred in darkened conditions, it was virtually impossible to engage these shooters or identify them without the aid of optics without the possibility of striking uninvolved people. It was extremely frustrating. Our assailants had no rules of engagement to abide by while we did.

For a time the gangs set aside their differences and concentrated on attacking the LAPD. On one wall they had spray painted in large, bold letters "BLOODS and CRIPS UNITE" They soon started to form vehicle

caravans of twenty to thirty vehicles and roamed through the city looking for victims. They were all armed and we knew this. Rather than expose our aircraft from Air Support Division to gunfire, we drove through the city to locate these caravans. When located, we called for other Metro units to block them and provide backup.

On one occasion my partner and I drove by a large crowd of gang members in a park. Since we came upon the gathering unexpectedly and had already been spotted by a few of them, we elected to simply confront the group. We exited our Metro vehicle simultaneously, assumed braced kneeling positions with our rifles by our opened doors—and simply waited to see what would transpire. Over a hundred gang members were milling about approximately 75 yards away from our position. After a brief, silent pause they began running in all directions. Not a shot was fired. It was an extremely odd situation. There were just two of us, over a hundred of them, many of whom were definitely armed, yet they were not willing to take on just the two of us.

Several days after the riots started, Marines from Camp Pendleton and National Guard units arrived to help us restore order, and camouflaged Humvees rolled through the city with mounted M-60 machine guns. For all intent and purpose, Los Angeles, the 'City of the Angels,' had been transformed into an urban battleground.

From the start of the riots until we had things under control—a period of about three weeks—we lived constantly with our weapons, body armor, Metro vehicles, and each other. Much of what I recall is blurred to an extent. The days and nights simply melded into one another. No one slept much especially those of us in Metro. I was exhausted, physically and mentally. Most of the officers who experienced the riots feel the same way and recollect events in a similar hazy manner . There were many Officer Involved Shootings throughout the city during this time period. Individuals downed by Metro officers were sometimes brought back to the CP and marked with the location of the incident and the names of the officers involved due to the continued gunfire throughout the city.

We learned many valuable lessons from the L.A. riots and made some necessary changes. These are a few examples:

• In low light conditions a rifle without optics or a weapon-mounted light is virtually useless, especially for precision shots. LAPD now mounts

optics and dedicated lights on their rifles.

• More officers need to be trained in advanced marksmanship and tactics which transcend simple rudimentary training. LAPD has established an urban rifle program within the department to supplement the Metropolitan Division.

• Officers in certain divisions need better personal protection. Previously, only SWAT had Level III body armor. Now all members of Metro have it, as do some specialized units.

• Whatever you need to fight with should be on you. Spare magazines, lights, secondary weapons and the like either are with you-or they are not. There was no going back to the vehicles once the shooting started.

• Equipment—weapons, ammunition, magazines, kneepads, lights, radios, etc.—have to be strapped on or strapped down securely or they will be lost due to fast movement and contact with surfaces and objects, such as those we encountered in looted or burned-out buildings.

• Opponents should not be underestimated. The individuals who shot at us were generally gang members who often used effective tactics, such as shooting and retreating from view, using large-caliber rifles with extended “reach”, and operating at night. They also learned our tactics fairly quickly and devised counter-tactics.

All of our basic skills and tactics were called into play during the riots. Had we not trained so extensively in Metro a number of us might not have survived and innocent people might have been injured or killed. As it happened, no LAPD officers were seriously injured. We engaged only armed aggressors. We maintained our composure and worked problems like the professionally trained team we were. Many situations we encountered were unique and would have been difficult to train for, but we adapted to them rapidly.

What ultimately got us through the riots were the basic skills which we relied upon. We employed basic tactics, basic communications, and basic shooting skills. Even when faced with advanced problems the tactics we employed to counter the threat always embodied basic skills. Without such basics things might have turned out very differently.

# EARLY DAYS OF SCOTT'S CAREER



Van Nuys Division. Special Problems Unit. 1979 - All Gunfighters.




Circa 1978— Mulholland Drive. Note Mickey Mouse ears on black and white. I carried a 6" S&W in a clamshell holster. LAPD history!

# SECTION II
# GUNFIGHTS: VARIOUS ASPECTS

"Gunfighting is adaptation and problem solving at speed under extreme duress."
— Scott Reitz

## AN OVERVIEW OF GUNFIGHTS

Gunfights can occur instantly and unexpectedly. In each of my shootings there was no advance notice, no warm-up, no coaching—nothing. What this meant was that whatever skills and training I needed to successfully resolve the situation had to be already in place, and they had to be utterly dependable because this was for keeps.

Gunfights are usually finished within a few seconds. Scientifically determining the actual duration of random gunfights is not possible, of course. Relying upon post-event recollections of participants and observers is also problematic because time seems elastic and recall inconsistent in situations of extreme stress. However, I have studied hundreds of law-enforcement related gunfights in detail and found that the great majority of them start and end in about three seconds. This does not include the time leading up to the shooting or the tactics employed but rather the time frame from when the active decision to engage has been made to the shooters cessation of fire. Are there gunfights that continue longer than a few seconds? Absolutely. Yet by and large they fall within this fairly small and unforgiving time frame.

This means that three seconds or so will be all the time available for you to perceive a threat, analyze the situation, decide whether it is necessary and lawful to shoot, assess background relative to the target, select the optional tactics, and techniques you can employ with respect to Constitutional Law, departmental policies and protocols, and so on. The decisions made and actions taken in those few seconds can have lifelong negative or positive consequences. There are the obvious possible consequences of one's own death or of receiving a crippling or disfiguring injury. But even if you come away physically unscathed you may suffer less visible effects, such as psychological or emotional damage. Then there are matters of law or policy that, breached in a heartbeat, can ruin an otherwise exemplary decades-long career.

Of course possible negative consequences are not limited to you alone. There is the possibility of death, disfigurement, or crippling of your opponent or an unintended victim of incorrect decisions. An undeniable fact is that one wrong split-second judgment—or even a correct judgment

followed by flawed marksmanship, bullet over-penetration, or even a ricochet—can end or drastically alter the life of an innocent bystander.

Pressing the trigger of a firearm aimed at another human being is an irreversible action that will be subjected to intense scrutiny by many parties over many years.

There is a brutal honesty in gunfighting. Either you struck your opponent or you did not. Either he struck you or he did not. Either you made and acted upon correct decisions or you did not. There is no false deception in such affairs. It is both brutal and honest in the same moment.

What has happened has happened and there is no turning back. It is not a game. In sum, the moral, legal, ethical, mental and physical consequence of applying deadly force with a firearm—the consequences of a gunfight—can remain with the shooter for years, perhaps for the rest of his life.

For these reasons, the physical and mental training you have prior to a gunfight is absolutely crucial, both to your survival and to having as positive an aftermath as possible.

Before I was ever involved in a gunfight I wondered how I would perform if I had to use deadly force. What would happen when it was for real and everything was on the line? Would the techniques I studied and practiced work? Would I make the correct decisions? How would the incident appear when carefully scrutinized by third parties?

These are valid questions. As I have noted, the answers depend largely upon preparation—but not just physical preparation. The greatest contribution to successful ‘on-demand performance’ in gunfighting is mental preparation, including attitude prior to and during the incident. That is, the will to win, and the determination to never give up, no matter what occurs. This also includes the ability to adapt and think one’s way through the gunfight. This is why I say gunfighting is 95% mental and 5% mechanical.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF GUNFIGHTS

To me, gunfights fall into certain categories. These are not all inclusive categories rather they are generalizations based on my knowledge of incidents which I have studied, defended, observed and participated in.

**Gunfights that are expected.**

Institutional experience, personal experience, common sense, or statistics sometimes indicate that a particular type of situation is likely to result in a gunfight. It can be quite stressful when you know in advance that you'll be involved in such a situation. A hostage situation might be just such an example.

I was on one LAPD SWAT call-up for a hostage situation involving an ex-convict member of the Aryan Brotherhood and two nurses. This call-up, (the Bomar incident) which became legendary, lasted from 0700 hours until 2400 hours. In this case we knew there was a high likelihood of eventually having to employ deadly force. We knew it, the psychologist on scene knew it, the command staff knew it, and as designated snipers we knew it as did the other members of 'D' platoon. Perhaps even the suspect knew it. We believed this probable shooting would most likely occur at night when the hostage-taker ran to a vehicle or when he was inside the vehicle. (He had demanded a getaway vehicle.) Making matters even more stressful, we had one obstacle after another thrown in front of us by the suspect, and there were thousands of people and news crews breathing down our necks while the drama unfolded. The entire city was riveted by the drama and each one of us was acutely aware that our actions would be on display for all to see and deconstruct for years afterward. I was a sniper during this incident, and throughout the day and ensuing night hundreds of different thoughts coursed through my mind. I "what if" this or "what if" that? the situation hundreds of different ways, but what transpired in the end took all of us by surprise. The suspect effectively neutralized our sniper positions by masking his movement to a getaway vehicle by discharging a dry chemical fire extinguisher. The suspect had dressed himself and his two female victims who were nurses, in surgical caps, masks, gloves, tunics, pants and booties. He had removed their makeup and taped their breasts so that all anyone would have to distinguish the suspect from the victims were three sets of eyes. This was a virtual impossibility. Superlative shooting by

our ground assault team resolved things in excellent fashion. This is an example of a gunfight that you know is coming.

**Gunfights that are unexpected.**

In 2005 there were forty separate instances of LAPD Officers being ambushed either during the course of normal patrol or on response to set-up calls. In one famous case, called the Toonerville shooting (the suspects involved were from the Toonerville gang in Northeast Division) and a case on which I testified, two officers were engaged in a high speed vehicle pursuit. Toward the end of the chase gang members had previously placed a washing machine in the narrow street, to slow down the police vehicle. An additional gang member standing on a corner as the police vehicle slowed down threw a bicycle underneath the LAPD black and white. The driving officer simply punched the accelerator and ran over the bicycle which then hung up underneath the undercarriage. As they negotiated a right hand turn after the vehicle they were pursuing they now received gunfire from their rear and right side. The vehicle they had been pursuing had suddenly and intentionally slowed to a crawl and the gang members within the vehicle attempted to engage them as well. All of this had been planned by the gang members well in advance, yet from the officers' perspective a vehicle pursuit had instantly become an all out gunfight - a pre-planned ambush! The officers had to respond immediately and think through the problem in order to prevail. Such situations probably require the most from a shooter in that he or she is already well behind the power curve. Whatever the shooter has 'on-board' in terms of skill will be tested to the extreme in such a situation.

**Gunfights that fall in between.**

There are certain situations that occur frequently, have many times been the occasion for a gunfight—but in which many officers, perhaps most, will never draw his or her weapon. A perfect example is the vehicle or pedestrian stop that officers conduct day after day, year after year. Thousands of these stops are conducted without incident and then, without warning, the unidentified traffic violator you just pulled over has also recently committed an armed robbery and thinks you've stopped him for that reason. A seemingly routine traffic stop suddenly erupts into a deadly fight for life. Another such example is the family/domestic dispute that unexpectedly goes south in a heartbeat. You may have handled hundreds of

such calls without incident but on this one, one party or the other has ‘just had it’ and you end up the target of their aggression. Such gunfights require that all of your skills and prior training be brought to the table in the blink of an eye. What you have you have and what you don’t have you don’t have and it’s as simple as that. The knowledge that such a situation has the known potential to go badly awry goes a long way towards preparing for it.

From my perspective, any of the three categories mentioned above will call for all your resources to be brought to bear in an instant.

## Universal Truths About Gunfighting

The universal truth about gunfights is that there are no universal truths. Gunfights are replete with variables unique unto themselves which will never be exactly replicated. What held true for one incident might not for another and so forth. Variables might be generally manifest from one shooting to the next, yet have slight but significant variations within themselves. There's not even a universal truthful description of a particular gunfight. People react differently to external stimuli, and focus on different aspects of events occurring around them, so your perception of what transpired in a gunfight may be markedly different from that of someone right next to you when it occurred. It is not at all unusual for two individuals to recount the same shooting in different time frames, distances, and sequential order. In some of the shootings that I have worked on and subsequently testified about, certain aspects of the shooting might be recalled by the shooters days and even weeks later. Perhaps this psychological phenomenon is caused by the way the brain processes certain information during and after a stressful incident.

In another sense, there are universal truths about gunfighting. There is a thread of continuity throughout all gunfights that go well. The basics are in place, clean mechanical skills are exhibited and the shooters mental composure is in evidence. There is a thread of continuity in all shootings that go poorly. The basic skills are not in place, clean mechanical skills are not in evidence and mental composure is all but absent. Over the decades that I have been involved in this business I have observed many things that hold true throughout many gunfights. There is no such thing as a standard or basic gunfight. You can be killed, crippled, maimed, disfigured, or paralyzed in any deadly force incident. You can make mistakes. You are human after all. You might perform well in one incident and in next one the proverbial wheels come off the cart. More to the point of this book is this truth: Individuals who have good clean mechanical, shooting and tactical skill sets and who additionally maintain their composure under fire seem to prevail more than those who do not. The deeper and broader the skill sets and the more clarity of thought under pressure that an individual exhibits, the more cleanly the gunfight is resolved. By the same token shootings that have not gone so well may have evidenced very few of these attributes.

This lack of the core basics and what they represent in total are generally not in evidence in marginal shootings. Remember this as you train.

## AVOIDING MISTAKES

Outside of warfare, gunfights are not experienced on a day-to-day basis. Indeed, very few civilians become involved in a gunfight during the course of their life. Even for law enforcement officers, the vast majority will never be involved in a shooting and only a very small percentage will be involved in more than one. What this means regarding gunfighting is that it's hard to learn from past mistakes.

Yet it is possible to train effectively for an event that comparatively few humans have ever, or will ever, be involved in. It requires departing from the theoretical. It requires making use of the instructor's real-world experience, and basing the training on practical, real-world scenarios derived from that experience. Ideally the instructor will explain his mistakes as well as his success. Realistic training teaches technique and the avoidance of mistakes.

At ITTS we do not teach abstract theory or untested, unrealistic techniques. We teach from and learn from the lessons of hundreds of documented gunfights and our personal experience. We don't just 'run scenarios'. The majority of ITTS training scenarios are based on actual individual gunfights, and we usually review these gunfights before and after the training evolution. In this training format, you learn from the real mistakes and success of others as opposed to the hypothetical or imagined. Conjecture and supposition have little place in real world training. This is one reason why our students have been successful in the field.

You should always seek training that teaches the simplest and cleanest tactics, skills, and thought processes necessary to resolve a conflict. Learn which mistakes occur frequently in actual gunfights. Learn which basic skills and which techniques have most often resulted in success.

If you work diligently in your training and conduct it along this line of thought and are truly honest with yourself, it will stand you far better than jumping from one school of thought and style to another and another resulting in a mish-mash of jumbled techniques that may or may not be workable in the real world.

If you make a mistake, either in training or in a gunfight, learn to maintain your composure and work the problem calmly and effectively. You must at all costs keep your head about you.

I don’t know if we ever executed a high risk search warrant or responded to a SWAT call up where mistakes weren’t made. Some were big and some weren’t. Yet we learned from them and always discussed any problems encountered before we went end of watch. Every member of the team had input at every level and this in turn led us to be a much more effective unit and therefore less prone to repeating the same mistakes in the future.

Another thing to keep in mind: An extremely skilled shooter may not have the flair that an exhibition shooter demonstrates but he does have the ability to think on his feet and he makes far fewer mistakes when it really counts: in the field.

Some people delude themselves when they train. They have an excuse for everything they did wrong and never place the blame where it really belongs—with the trainee himself. Such a person will never progress very far. If you are brutally honest with yourself (gunfights are brutally honest after all) you will learn more and in less time than the delusional shooter who ‘never makes mistakes.’

I demonstrate live fire evolutions in all my classes. Sometimes I make mistakes and sometimes I don’t. When I do, I tell the students what it was; I don’t attempt to hide it from the class. There is simply no point in that. Learning from mistakes is the key difference, the one that ultimately spells success in the field.

## LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Occasionally we have the opportunity to learn from the experience of others. When such an opportunity presents itself the first thing to do is ensure that the individuals relating such experiences are truthful and that their statements have been verified. The LAPD is unique in that so many of its officers have been involved in a gunfight or an Officer Involved Shooting. As a rookie I sought them out, asked them to recount their shootings and give me any advice they had to offer. I was always impressed at the honesty and forthright manner in which they related such incidents. Their personal experiences and reactions ran the gamut. Some officers had no time whatsoever to think about what they had to do and they simply reacted. Others had time to think about what they had to do and they carried it out. Some had been wounded, others had lost partners. Many of them expressed to me the emotions they experienced, and those too ran the gamut —fear, anger, grief, and relief. I learned one thing above all from each of these officers and that was to expect everything and nothing at the same time. This was perhaps the germination of my personal approach to teaching many years later. Expect nothing—prepare for everything.

## KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

When a gunfight starts, you can experience many psychological reactions. Two that I've experienced are "This can't be happening to me" and "Have you lost your mind," the latter concerning an opponent. Why someone would go up against a group of heavily armed and highly trained individuals is beyond me, and yet they do.

Simply being aware that these thoughts might occur will help you in a gunfight. With thorough and realistic training you will push through them in a fraction of a second and react properly. By talking to people who have experienced gunfights and by studying documented shootings, you learn these seemingly small things that could actually be critical to success. Knowing what you might experience physically or psychologically can prevent a panicked and bungled response; instead, you'll know that others have been here and have gotten through it and therefore you can, too.

Physiologically during a gunfight or other life-threatening experience, it is not uncommon to have a marked narrowing of peripheral vision or for the auditory senses to dull and the shooter to experience a dramatic alteration of sights and sounds and even smells. The body is preparing for a survival event and this in turn, releases adrenalin and steroids. The heart rate soars, respiration increases the breathing may be shallow. There may be induced tremor of the hands and fingers and body accompanied by a flushed sensation in the neck and head area. The finer motor skills may be degraded whereas gross motor skills and overall strength of the shooter may be significantly upgraded. Any and all of these symptoms might be experienced in a gunfight. Again, knowing that these phenomena can and do occur better prepares you.

## KNOW YOUR OPPONENT

If you are not in the military and not in a terrorist-rich environment, your most likely gunfighting opponent will be of the criminal persuasion. Such individuals have matriculated to this level of force and criminal activity through the commission of lesser crimes for a number of years – not always, but usually. Hard-core criminal types do not see the world as you do. If you understand nothing else, then you should at least grasp this concept. The rules, morals, and values that you ascribe to and live your life by are a totally foreign concept to them. Where you may see compassion, criminals see weakness and the opportunity to exploit. Where you might give quarter they will be totally ruthless, showing little or no mercy. As they see it, what's yours should be theirs and they may use whatever means are at hand to effect the transfer. In the course of such a 'transaction' they have little time for dialogue or rational thought (which is why they're involved in this business in the first place). They work on whims and impulse and animalistic instincts. They operate extemporaneously in other words they simply do what they do simply because they do it. There is little thought to what they are about to do or are in fact, doing. While this might be a hard concept for the good guys to wrap their heads around you need to understand it. They have already broken so many rules that breaking a few more means little or nothing to them. Where you and I might be in abject fear of even the mere thought of a prison term or to even be charged with a crime, they view it as a perfectly natural course of events. Five years incarceration to them is referred to as, 'nickel time' and ten years as, 'dime time' and so on. They do not view their life as a whole but rather a day-to-day existence. They give no thought whatsoever to the destruction of lives and relationships that their criminal actions have caused. There is no moral outrage, no guilt, and no introspective analysis of their actions. In short, they are not you…and they are not me.

I came across these aspects of the criminal nature time after time on the streets of Los Angeles. We would arrest a suspect for some crime and during the course of the investigation I would always be struck by their complete lack of remorse over their actions and the injuries and damage to lives that their crimes had caused. As one suspect told me, "Hey man, he

had it coming. I wasn't going to pass on him. If you can't handle it then I'm going to work you, plain and simple." This pretty much says it all.

Very few suspects want to target someone who can either hurt them or make it so difficult to take down that it simply isn't worth their effort. We stopped a suspect in a vehicle once who was wearing a shoulder holster for a 1911 Colt .45 Auto. I was in Metro at the time and we used advanced vehicle tactics on the stop and approach. During the pat down search, we discovered the shoulder rig he was wearing with two spare fully loaded magazines yet no pistol.

"Where's the gun?"

"In the car, man."

"Why isn't it in the holster?"

"You kiddin'? One look at you guys and I knew you had me. I ain't no fool man, no way. I let it go, brother."

"Did you have it on when we stopped you?"

"Hell yes, what's the point of not havin' it man?"

Point well taken. Sure enough, the gun was on the floorboard, fully loaded and ready to go. Had it been an officer that he felt he could take, he would have done so, and in a heartbeat!

I always made a point of asking armed suspects that we had arrested why they didn't 'go for it'. The answer was universal. They knew they would be in jeopardy should they make the wrong move so they didn't. Many criminals have an uncanny knack for reading people and situations. This is their stock in trade —reading victims. Despite many of them displaying bravado and boasting how they'll never be taken alive, very few will hold on to this notion when someone of ability opposes them.

We saw this time and again on SWAT warrants executed against gang members and dope dealers who vowed never to be taken alive. Very few ever went to guns and some of the more vocal suspects offered the least resistance. They are cowards and they use fear and intimidation to attain what they want. The last thing they want or expect in many cases is the opponent who is a very real threat to their safety. This unnerves them and they avoid such individuals like the plague.

It is very hard to convey to people that have never dealt with such types just how ruthless hard core criminals can be. Most of these types have nothing to lose. They own nothing, they have no real relationships, no

goals, no aspirations and in a sense they are ‘one per-centers’ as they might refer to themselves. They have one per cent of life to live for as they see it. That leaves 99% of their self value being devoted to doing whatever it is that they feel they need to at any given time. They live and work in a world of amoral impulse and have distanced themselves so far from societal norms that they can act with a detached ruthlessness. They act extemporaneously, whenever and wherever their impulses direct them and when they come at you, it might very well come unexpectedly and for no apparent reason—at least from your point of view. Gang members are even more callous and indifferent to society in general and anyone not affiliated with them is fair game in their book. These, are very dangerous people!

I have given several common traits of hardened criminals, but there are countless other aspects and psychological profiles of the ones I came across throughout my career. Suffice it to say that from one end of the spectrum to the other, all had a complete disregard for the rights and sanctity of others. If you can comprehend this trait shared by all criminals it will serve you well when understanding your likely opponent.

Honed skills and an understanding of the law will always be your best weapon against hardened criminals. Awareness of your surroundings and unfolding situations will place you well ahead of the power curve in an unpleasant situation. As simple as these concepts sound they can be very effective. Once again the basics will carry the day.

## THE AFTERMATH

Recalling what happened during a gunfight is not especially easy, probably due to the fact that there are so many critical matters that rapidly and fully consume your attention that minutiae simply doesn't come into play. You must switch from an observational mode to a decision mode and then to a mechanical response mode in mere fractions of seconds when in the field. The courts and investigatory entities will spend years deconstructing these fractions of seconds.

It takes some time to slowly put it all back together after a gunfight. In some after-action debriefings, police officers recollect specific aspects of the incident, hours, days and even weeks later. Even when a gunfight is captured on video, a participant may have a much different recollection of the time and events compared to what the replay shows and it can be amazing just how much detail and how many decisions that your mind can process and your body reacted to in just those few seconds.

Some critics may allude to a cover-up or a less-than-candid recollection of these events, but in reality it appears to be simply the way the brain processes traumatic experiences. Even in a non-traumatic situation, we're all different and therefore may recall events at different rates, and the things recalled may be more vivid for one individual as opposed to another. I have debriefed officers involved in the same shooting who recalled different aspects of the event. Sometimes one officer was acutely aware of a singular point of fact, yet his partner had no memory of it whatsoever. This does not mean that they were wrong or distorted in recollection; it simply means that what their mind focused on or perceived as important stood out more than it did in the mind of another participant.

There are also physiological reasons for limited or differing recollections of a gunfight. The body has prepared itself for the event by releasing adrenalin and steroids. Increased heart rates and respiration or a 'flushed' sensation and deadening to pain may all be experienced in varying degrees among varying individuals. As noted above, there may be a marked narrowing of peripheral vision; the auditory senses can dull; time frames may collapse or expand; the participant can experience dramatic alterations of sights, sounds, and even smells. All of this can affect what is perceived and recorded by the mind, what is left out, and what is recalled.

Immediately after a shooting there might be a rapid mental processing of what just occurred and this will be recounted again and again over a protracted period of time. It is a moment of high stress and heightened senses and the brain recalls such events repeatedly. There may be victims to attend to, a crime scene to contain and witnesses to gather. It is during this time that you need to breathe, settle down, and bring things under control. Ensure that any opponents can pose no further threat. Be alert for other individuals that may be allied with your opponent. Ensure that no one else needs immediate attention. If you're a law enforcement officer then reporting the incident to your department or responding agency will be mandatory. Civilians will also have to account for their actions with the option of having an attorney present. Whether you are communicating the incident over a police frequency or via telephonic measures one should keep it brief, succinct and to the point. If you are not in law enforcement, inform them that you were involved in a shooting then render a brief description of yourself and where you are. Comply with any instructions given to you either during this communication or when officers arrive on the scene.

## CAN YOU MASTER GUNFIGHTING?

No, you cannot ‘master’ gunfighting. There are simply too many variables in real world gunfights to master all possible scenarios. By my definition, a ‘master’ regarding this field of study would always make correct decisions and perform flawlessly in any situation, with no room for improvement if the incident were thoroughly examined. This is a virtual impossibility.

Some people ascribe the term ‘master’ to themselves in the arena of shooting and gunfighting, even when they have never been in a gunfight let alone any tactical situation whatsoever. An old adage comes to mind: “Never believe your own press!” Egotism has felled many a person throughout the ages and it will continue to do so. One should tread softly. I have never thought of myself as a master of gunfighting. The seasoned professionals that I have worked with and who have prevailed in documented gunfights would never ascribe to themselves the term ‘master.’ They are well aware that, in the right—or wrong—circumstances, anyone can be taken and they too, can make mistakes.

Looking at it another way, no opponent is ever going to disparage you for not being a ‘master’ gunfighter if you prevail in the gunfight. Results in the field are what count.

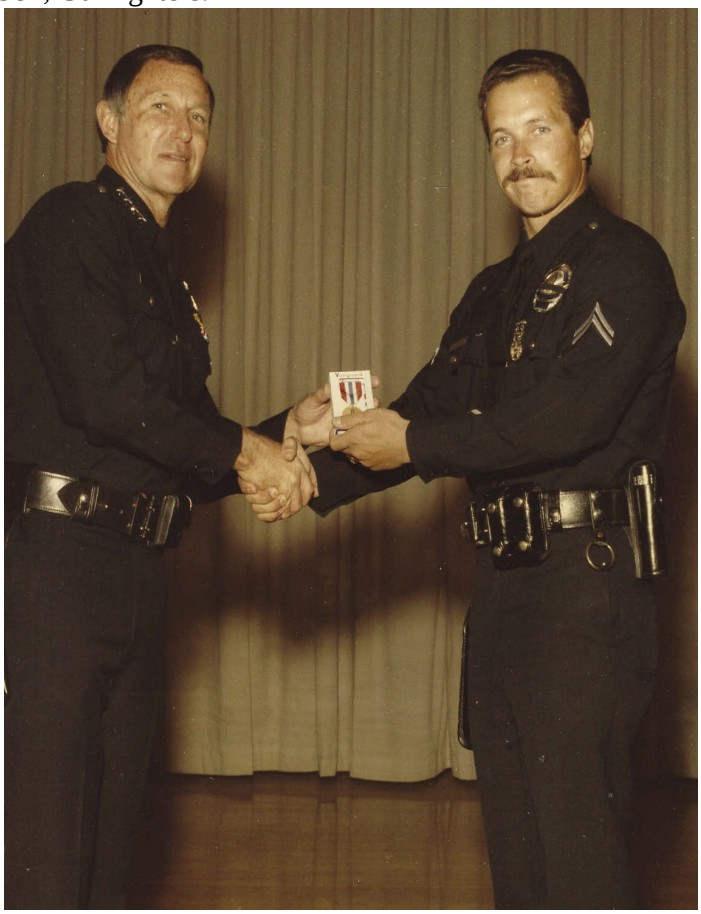
So if there is no possibility of ever ‘mastering’ gunfighting, what’s the use of studying it? The obvious answer is that doing so may save your life or that of another. Through diligent training and seeking perfection in each and every thing you do regarding this field, you increase the chance of performing smoothly and rapidly under stress and you minimize the chance of making mistakes. You elevate your ability to adapt to the many problems you may confront. Effective training ensures positive results and avoids incorrect decisions and actions. All the thousands of hours of training will be well worth it if it saves you just one time or allows you to avoid mistakes. This is a sound philosophy to train by.

A final thought: Gunfighting, conducted properly, is the mental evaluation of a situation followed by the physical application of the mechanics to carry out the firing solution. Mental composure under stress in concert with adaptation will always be the key linchpin to successfully resolving a gunfight.

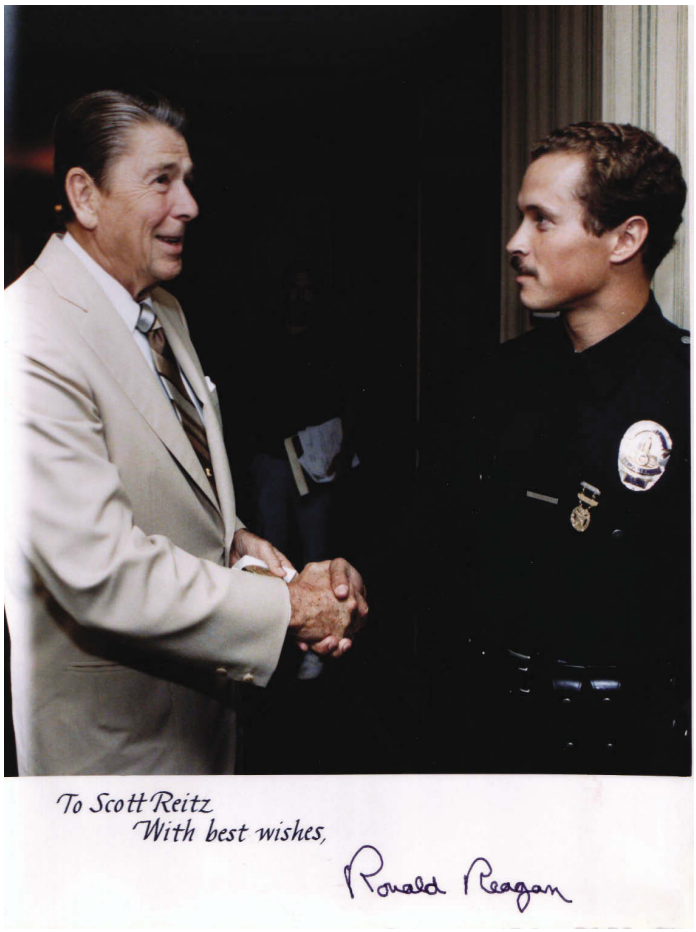
# SCOTT'S YEARS IN SWAT




LAPD SWAT Circa 1984, Gunfighters.



Chief Gates presents Scott with LAPD SWAT Meritorious
Unit citation.




Presenting President Ronald Reagan with a SWAT belt buckle.





Los Angeles Time

Recor
of Coc
Tip Leads
Drug Stash

My partner and me. To this date the worlds largest cocaine seizure ever. 20 tons of pure cocaine and 10 million in cash!



SWAT insertion (you had to really hold on doing this).



LAPD SWAT steel window pull on rock house.

# SECTION III
# LAWS OF DEADLY FORCE

“You cannot plead ignorance of the law if you take another’s life or cause them serious injury.”
— Scott Reitz

## LAWS OF DEADLY FORCE

There are many misconceptions and much incorrect information regarding the application of deadly force. You may survive a shooting and yet find yourself mired in a legal quagmire that could very easily and quite radically alter the rest of your life if you acted on flawed information. I would be extremely reticent to take the advice of someone with no practical background or knowledge of the legal system. Flawed knowledge is just that…flawed. I have testified or consulted in both Federal and Superior Courts across the United States as a deadly force expert, and continue to do so. Qualifying for this requires a combination of background, experience, credibility, education and individual accomplishments in the area of deadly force. All of this is brought into question, literally, during the depositional phase of a court case, in the process known as voir-dire. The scrutiny occurs when the 'expert' is on the stand testifying and being subjected to questions regarding competence and qualifications regarding the specific area of expertise upon which they will subsequently testify. A good attorney will quickly shred to pieces a fraud or disingenuous individual purporting to be an expert in deadly force.

Suffice it to say that the subject of deadly force could be a book in itself. The primary intent of this section is to give the reader the bare essentials necessary to understand when and when not one should or can use deadly force to protect one's self or others.

First and foremost, the courts expect you to know the laws regarding deadly force if you apply it. "I didn't know" or, "I wasn't aware" simply doesn't cut it. You cannot plead ignorance of the law if you take another's life or cause them serious injury.

Understand that deadly force is that force which when applied is likely to cause death and/or great bodily injury. Having said that, here are some basic deadly force legal concepts:

1. You must be in reasonable fear of death or great bodily injury. Death is self-explanatory. Great bodily injury might encompass lacerations of a substantial nature, rape, permanent loss or impairment of certain bodily functions or organs, major fractures, mayhem (a cognate of maim), and loss of consciousness. The definition of reasonable however, is the most important part of this concept. The 'Reasonable Man Standard' is how a

like individual with a like amount of background training and knowledge prior to the incident, coupled with the individual's understanding of the totality of the circumstances at the time of the incident would have acted at that time under those circumstances. In other words; if the person using deadly force had prior background training and knowledge of the law and his knowledge of the incident at the time dictated that this prior knowledge and training be put to use to preserve his life or save himself or another from death and/or grievous bodily harm, and it was reasonable that he use such deadly force to ensure either his or another's safety and life, then the use of deadly force would be justified and reasonable. Many cases hinge on an individual's perception of the threat he faced. This perception however, must also be reasonable and supported by verifiable evidence in one form or another from an objective viewpoint. For instance, deadly force might be used against an unarmed assailant if there were a great disparity in size or strength between the assailant and his intended victim, such as a diminutive female weighing 110 pounds versus a 6' 2" ex-con who weighs in at 260lbs and can bench press 500 pounds. This concept of disparity of force might also come into play if the intended victim were faced with a number of threatening opponents.

2. The assailant must have the ability to inflict death and/or great bodily injury. This issue will be called into question in every case. A man standing 100 yards away threatening you with a knife does not reasonably at that time have the ability to inflict injury; he must close the distance. Threats alone, without the ability to carry them out, do not justify utilizing deadly force.

3. There must be intent to cause death or great bodily injury. A vehicle can surely cause either death and or great bodily injury, yet an automobile accident caused by another person would not in and of itself constitute that person's intent to cause death or great bodily injury. The application of deadly force would not be justified in such a case. Intent will be formulated by a person's actions or words coupled with his physical acts and ability.

The laws of deadly force are intentionally broad. Each deadly force incident is unique. The courts must adjudicate each case based on its own individual merits. For this reason trials involving use of deadly force are often complicated and protracted, sometimes spanning years. There will be

questions on virtually every aspect of the case that the attorneys and experts will have to explain to a jury and both sides may have differing views and opinions. If prior history or aggravated circumstances are involved, they will certainly become pivotal issues. Love triangles, neighbor or business disputes, prior histories with individuals etc. will come to the forefront whenever deadly force has been applied if applicable.

A thorough investigation of the case will reveal attempts to create a situation where there is a reasonable expectation that deadly force would eventually be applied. For instance, a dispute in a bar leads to one party exiting the establishment, acquiring a firearm, and then returning to the bar and confronting the individual with whom he had the dispute, resulting in a deadly force scenario. This might fall into the category of premeditation. He knew that he was now armed, that he had the ability to cause death or serious bodily injury to another and yet he elected to continue on this course of action with the full knowledge that he could in fact, apply such force to the other individual.

In some cases, there is an inherent legal duty, within reasonable limits, to retreat or to avoid a deadly force confrontation. An officer of the law does not necessarily have this same duty to retreat. It is his job to confront individuals and then use whatever means are at his disposal to effectuate an arrest if one is required. However, even the law enforcement officer must use every reasonable means at his immediate disposal to avoid deadly force in order to effectuate such an arrest. In a shooting, the courts will critically examine actions taken with an eye towards what was reasonable and what, if anything, the shooter could have done to avoid the deadly conflict in the first place.

As we explain to ITTS students, carrying a firearm imposes the responsibility to avoid confrontations and use prudence in situations where they might occur. Ego, anger, rage and pride are not justification for deadly force no matter how enraged or offended one may be. In some instances, no matter what your intentions may be, another person’s actions can instantly vacate all other reasonable and viable options for resolving a situation. For example, a charging man armed with a knife at close quarters leaves little room for dialogue or alternative means of neutralizing the threat. An assailant engaging you with gunfire might fall into the same category as well. This being said, if there are any other reasonable alternative means

available to avoid using deadly force then by all means avail yourself to such means.

Although there are exceptions, in most states deadly force may not be used to protect personal property. Were one to confront a thief and the thief escalates matters to where he poses a danger of death or great bodily injury this may now be an entirely different situation.

The law recognizes the sanctity of your personal home and the duty to protect yourself and family. If you apply deadly force to a person within your home, the burden of proof may rest on that person regarding actions he took that placed him there. Some states have adopted a ‘stand your ground’ approach to the use of deadly force, also referred to as the ‘castle law.’ Such a philosophy may allow for someone to use deadly force as a first resort when threatened, as opposed to other means of resolving the conflict. Some may criticize this as a ‘shoot first-ask questions later’ philosophy; time will tell if it holds up within the courts. I recommend using other means first, if in fact they are reasonable, before applying deadly force. The laws of one state may vary greatly from those of another; do not expect one state to abide by the dictates of another. Understand the laws of your own state.

Closely related to the subject of using other means is the concept of force continuum. That is, an individual’s response to a threat should closely mirror that threat. It may also be thought of in the following terms; that force used must be that force necessary to neutralize a threat and no more. This is not always an easy thing to gauge since situations can rapidly devolve from benign to deadly within seconds and then revert back again. Nonetheless this force continuum model is the benchmark, and you should strive to adhere to it.

Poorly trained individuals may develop the dangerous attitude that, rather than take any chances, they will shoot even though they may not be absolutely sure that it’s the right thing to do. This almost always results in a bad shooting. Target identification, threat level assessment, and the decision to employ deadly force must be properly “trained to”. Again, if you have any doubt whatsoever, do not shoot; wait to ensure that the decision you make is the morally and legally defensible one.

Some of the worst advice given by ‘armchair experts’ is how one might alter a crime scene to justify a shooting. Aside from moral and legal considerations, consider the fact that investigators do their job day in and

day out. They are acutely aware of facts and investigative techniques that the everyday citizen would never dream of. The chances of, out-thinking them is remote. If in fact you have made an error in judgment, it is far better to get it out in the open and deal with it from there on. Deceit only complicates the issue and lends itself towards building a case against you. We all make mistakes and this is far more understandable in the court's eyes than lying about the facts of a case. As an expert witness, I can defend mistakes, but I cannot defend deceit and dishonesty.

Another complicating factor in shootings is prior knowledge. This usually comes into play when there is a history between two parties that turns deadly. Simple neighbor disputes, business disputes and personal relationships have erupted into gunfire and as always, the history between the two will eventually come forward one way or another. Perhaps one party knew the potential for conflict was there and he allowed it to build knowing full well that the probability of gunfire was just around the corner. People talk, witnesses come forward, and in no time at all it is readily apparent that one party set up the other, resulting in a homicide. This would be a very hard case to defend, if indeed it could be defended at all.

Deadly force cases that I have been involved in are extremely thorough in the scope of their investigation. Officers have expressed astonishment at what facts have surfaced during the preparation for court, some of which have nothing to do with the case at all. The facts of either a criminal or civil action that are discoverable through the courts can be quite an eye opener. Forensics will determine blood spray patterns, bullet trajectories, the history of discharged rounds, along with a myriad of other evidentiary facts and empirical data surrounding the case. Background investigations will reveal the past history of the parties involved, past oral and written statements, perhaps photographs or videos of an incriminating nature, website history, criminal history and so on. Witnesses and past relationships seem to come forward from out of the woodwork, and can harm an individual's case through no fault of their own. The average citizen, and even average law enforcement officer, has little or no comprehension of the depth to which a shooting can be investigated. It is worth keeping this in mind when tactical and deadly force decisions are made.

Some shooting cases may bifurcate due to circumstances. That is, there may be a criminal and a civil action. The criminal aspect deals with the lawfulness of a person's actions. For example, was a shooting lawful and reasonably justifiable or was it not? The civil action weighs the actions of an individual and decides whether the individual has demonstrated civil negligence in applying deadly force even though the actions may have been legally justifiable. The outcome of a criminal trial depends on a unanimous jury decision whereas that of a civil action is dependent on a majority jury decision. Either legal process can be very lengthy, drain finances, strain relationships, affect mental health, and derail careers. Before you act on the advice "It's better to be tried by twelve than carried by six", consider the consequences. I understand the basic concept behind this statement, but it must always be weighed within the context of, reasonably and legally sound actions.

Perhaps the better way to approach the question of deadly force as regards legal questions is to consider the following; ultimately your fate will be decided by the investigators, the detectives, the court, and the jury. Their actions and decisions will not be colored by the experiences or mindset that you have developed over your lifetime. They may not view the world as you do. Whether you like this or not, this is a very real fact of life that should not go ignored.

For every case that I take on as an expert witness, I turn down many, many more. I only take on cases that I truly believe in. They can demand hundreds of hours of investigation and effort on my behalf. As a result, there are many lessons learned that are applied in our ITTS classes whether the students are aware of them or not.

In summation, regarding the use of deadly force; keep in mind that you alone bear the moral and legal responsibilities for your actions. You will be questioned extensively about your actions and you must live with them. What has been done cannot be undone.

# SECTION IV
# SAFETY

“An old fighter pilot adage readily applies to firearms safety. Complacency kills.”
—Scott Reitz

## SAFETY

Firearms are tools designed to be weapons. Bullets are designed to crush, tear, rip, break, shatter, perforate, lacerate, pulverize tissue, organs, and bone. Neither firearms nor bullets possess a will or volition of their own. Bullets possess no conscious thought, no compassion, no remorse and most certainly, they do not possess the ability to reverse that which has been done. If you make a mistake with a firearm you can pay dearly for it. Death, disfigurement, total or partial paralysis, total or partial impairment of bodily functions can all result from a violation of safety principles. If it happens, it will be sudden and instantaneous. Every individual that has ever experienced a negligent discharge and especially those that have been injured as a result, most probably experienced shock and disbelief at what occurred.

As of this writing I personally have a flawless safety record in training. ITTS also has a flawless safety record in training. Towards the latter portion of my career with the Los Angeles Police Department, I personally trained an average of over 7,000 officers annually. Concurrently, ITTS trained thousands of domestic and foreign police officers, civilians, and military personnel as well. We have conducted classes where the primary languages have ranged from French, Italian, Greek, Spanish, and even Tagalog in the Philippines. Despite these language differences, our safety protocols have always been made clear and our safety record has remained unblemished throughout three decades of training and beyond. This is not by chance but rather by design. I am also acutely aware that this can change in an instant during the very next training evolution that we run.

## A Basic Safety Concept

A first and crucial concept regarding safety is that your normal body movements must be radically altered when working with a firearm especially the pistol. That is, your everyday comportment—body movement, gestures, even verbal responses—must be consciously restricted or altered when a pistol is introduced into the equation. You can no longer turn toward someone to respond to an inquiry when holding a pistol, nor can you point or gesticulate with a pistol in hand, and in general you cannot bend and move and articulate your body while holding a pistol in the same manner as you otherwise would. In fact this basic concept applies to all firearms. Keep this in mind at all times.

## THE REITZ LAW OF SAFETY

**The Reitz Law of Safety is one of an inversely proportional relationship. It is the following: the more one works with firearms, the more dangerous one becomes.**

This may seem contrary to expectations. Logically it seems that the more one gains experience, the more one develops proficiency, which should translate into increased safety. However, there are two reasons why firearms safety flies in the face of this logic.

The first reason has to do with mathematical probability. Imagine that you took only one airplane ride in your entire lifetime and then landed safely. If you never ventured into the skies again, your chance of ever being involved in a mid-air collision would be non-existent. If you continued to fly, you would automatically increase your chance of being involved in a collision. It's that simple, and the same laws of probability apply to firearms.

The second reason has to do with human nature. Some of the most egregious violators of firearm safety rules are the very people you would think would be the last to do so. SWAT team members, police officers, various military personnel, and even firearms instructors have all experienced catastrophic safety failures as a result of their personal actions. This does not mean that these people as a whole are unsafe or that their safety record is worse than the general populace, but rather that a number of devastating firearms mishaps has befallen these groups when by all accounts it shouldn't have. From 2004 through 2008, nationwide, one SWAT officer lost a leg, two others were shot to death, three firearms instructors shot students to death during instruction, one police firearms instructor shot another instructor, and one shot himself. These are but a few of the mishaps that I am aware of. There were undoubtedly many more that I never heard about. The most likely reason behind such incidents is that these people constantly handled firearms. Familiarity de-sensitized them to the danger firearms pose, and no doubt caused diminishment of the basic safety concept regarding body position and movement, and certainly caused violations of the other fundament rules of firearm safety outlined below. An old fighter pilot adage readily applies to firearms safety: Complacency kills.

## ACCIDENTAL OR NEGLIGENT?

In the 1990's the LAPD changed its terminology regarding unintended firing of weapons from accidental discharge to negligent discharge. In this regard the department was correct. The term 'negligence' properly emphasizes that responsibility lies with the shooter, and that the shooter did something wrong. This is as it should be. Is there ever such a thing as an accidental discharge? Yes. This would be a firearm discharging due to mechanical malfunction of either the weapon or the cartridge. Such malfunctions are very few and far between. The vast majority of firearm mishaps are the result of incorrect human actions. Always bear in mind that any firearm will respond to the inputs placed into it. Incorrect input = incorrect results. Correct inputs = correct results. This is simple and straightforward.

## THE FOUR BASIC GUN SAFETY RULES

**Safety Rule Number One**

All guns are loaded and are to be treated as such at all times.

This is a departure from the traditional firearms safety rule Number One, which is usually expressed as Treat all guns as if they were loaded. I started teaching this modification to the rule over 15 years ago. Treat in this context is too soft a word in my opinion and it doesn't carry the weight of simply stating that all guns are always loaded! This means that even if the magazine is out and the slide is locked to the rear it should be handled the same as a loaded pistol.

When I was a younger police officer, I distinctly remember certain firearms instructors sweeping the class with the muzzle of a pistol or shotgun as cavalierly as if it had been a water pistol when they lectured to us. Perhaps the firearm was unloaded at the time, but what if this was not the case? This set the tone for the class, and when a loaded firearm was introduced into the equation, the same lax attitude prevailed.

If you have one set of rules for unloaded firearms and another set of rules for loaded firearms, then the possibility for a mishap or a crossover of the safety rules is high. In law enforcement, the loaded/unloaded condition of a firearm continually changes, as during a transition from on-duty to off-duty status, a transition from one weapon system to another, a transition from training format to the field, a transition from one training evolution to another, and so forth. If you simply treat all firearms as if they were loaded (whether they are or not) you ingrain solid safety habits.

There are instances where unloaded firearms are used for the purpose of demonstration or training to illustrate a point of fact. If this is done under extremely strict guidelines and with double and even triple redundancy checks, then you probably won't incur a mishap. If on the other hand, you go from one weapons condition to the next and then back again and you apply different sets of rules as this is conducted then the potential for a negligent discharge increases.

Accepting the Reitz Rule and the modification of Rule Number One instills a deep safety ethos that results in a greatly diminished chance of experiencing a negligent discharge and the potentially terrible consequences.

**Safety Rule Number Two**

Never allow the muzzle to cover anything you are not willing to destroy.

LAPD changed the wording on this one—erroneously in my opinion—from destroy to shoot. The term shoot is too soft a term in my book. Semantics are important; the connotation of a single word can have profound implications. Bullets do destroy, therefore we should state this as it is. Where the muzzle is directed the bullet is directed, and there is no recall option.

Because pistols are relatively compact and easily maneuvered within the hand(s), they are especially susceptible to violating this safety rule. Shifting the muzzle just a few degrees, tilting the pistol, or making an unconscious gesture with the gun hand can point the muzzle in an unsafe direction. This means that you must actively think about what you're doing when you handle a pistol—in fact, when you handle any firearm.

**Safety Rule Number Three**

The trigger finger stays off the trigger and positioned alongside the frame until you intend to shoot.

In high stress situations, fine motor skills such as controlling the amount of pressure you exert on a trigger, as well as your ability to feel how much pressure you're exerting, may be severely degraded. Perceived slight pressure may in fact be much greater—enough, in fact, to discharge the weapon. Failure to adhere to Rule Number Three on the range might lead to a very real problem on the streets, because we fight as we train. That is to say, under stress we revert to the way we do things in training. Police Officers as well as others in varying occupations have shot partners, family members, and fellow soldiers in actual tactical situations when there was absolutely no cause to do so. Invariably these mishaps stemmed from the lax and/or improper application of simple firearms safety protocols.

As far as speed in getting off an aimed shot goes, consider the following: from any position where your pistol is not perfectly aimed at your target—that is, any position in which you're not absolutely ready to shoot—the final aiming cannot be done any faster than the trigger finger can move from its safe position alongside the frame down to the trigger itself. This means you lose nothing in speed yet gain everything in safety.

There have been numerous incidents in which one person is holding another at gunpoint yet has his finger improperly placed on the trigger, and under the stress of the moment has inadvertently pressed off a shot. Other individuals have applied deadly force when appropriate and then - when the deadly force threat no longer existed, applied deadly force unintentionally due to the fact they trained improperly. The legal ramifications of such an action are far-reaching. Again: if you have no immediate intention to shoot, or you are not focused on the sights with the intention to shoot, then keep your finger off the trigger and alongside the frame.

**Safety Rule Number Four**

Always be sure of your target and the target's background and immediate surroundings.

There are really two parts to Rule Number Four:

1. If you are not 100% sure of the target then don't shoot. It's as simple as that. Of the tens of thousands of students which we have taught throughout the years, several hundred have subsequently been involved in documented shootings, and to my personal knowledge not a single one has ever been involved in an 'out of policy' or 'bad' shooting as a result of not adhering to Rule Number Four. This is a direct result of our teaching methods. Again: If there is any doubt whatsoever as to whether you should engage a target or not, then back off from the shot until you are absolutely positive that it is in fact, the right thing to do!

2. You should be 100% sure of what is in the background area of your target before you shoot. Background includes the area behind, to the sides, immediately above, and in front of the target.

Because it is your responsibility to ensure the safety of non-threatening individuals when you shoot, you may have to place yourself in greater peril in order to accomplish this. The decision to do so is wholly dependent on your motive and/or your mission. In some combat settings there is a calculated risk to employ deadly force in order to prevent further damage. A calculated risk is distinctly different from that of an uncalculated risk in which a shooter simply 'freeboards' a situation and goes for broke irrespective of the attendant risks involved. A hostage situation or an active shooter surrounded by innocent citizens are two possible cases where you might have to choose a tactic or firing solution that is the most effective way to resolve the situation but which leaves you dangerously exposed.

In some instances shooters have simply moved from their original position or dropped down in elevation relative to the target in order to decrease the potential threat to persons in the background. In such cases, even though the shooter has attempted to mitigate the threat to others the shooter will still bear the ultimate moral and legal consequences of his or her actions.

Another factor to consider relative to background is that bullets ricochet and deviate from their initial flight path depending on what surfaces they strike and the angle of incidence at which the rounds strike.

Taking this into account can be difficult, and indeed may not be accurately determinable by the shooter at that moment, but it must be kept in mind and considered nonetheless.

Yet another factor to consider is that bullets can over-penetrate, passing through the target and continuing on. These so-called through-and-through shots are not all that uncommon in the field.

## SAFETY AS A TACTIC

Many individuals regard firearms safety as a stand-alone issue. It is anything but that. Safety is an integral part of tactics. It does you absolutely no good to shoot either yourself or others that you don't intend to shoot in a tactical situation. Think of it this way: don't do unto yourself what the bad guy has been trying to do to you all along.

Many individuals have shot partners, team members and bystanders in critical situations due to a lax attitude towards safety during training scenarios that carried over into the field—when it was 'for real.'

Imagine, for instance, this following situation. You engage an assailant when it is well within the legal framework to do so. The assailant is struck peripherally, or even missed altogether, yet he has dropped his weapon and surrendered. As you approach the suspect, who no longer poses a deadly force threat, you cover him with your pistol yet have your finger improperly positioned on the trigger and you inadvertently press off a shot, killing or injuring the now-unarmed suspect. Just to drive home the point, imagine that there are about a dozen witnesses to this and that it's caught on video, and add to that your own moral considerations and legal responsibility. The fact that you had your finger on the trigger in direct violation of safety protocols (which you may have been lax about during training) and were covering the suspect when he was no longer a threat has transformed a legally defensible shooting into a negligent homicide or assault with a deadly weapon charge at best. The effects of this one shot will last for years. Lives have been radically altered, vast sums of money will be depleted, and careers destroyed by one safety rule violation.

Again, safety and tactics are interdependent. Safety is not a 'stand alone' issue. Safety is an integral part of tactics. Safety is not a 'myth' it is practiced and adhered to and constantly enforced. Safety is a viable ethos which stems from those with real world experience who know better. Sound tactics require that safety is always, always in place.

Another aspect of safety that has rarely been addressed—possibly never—is that of ego. Ego and firearms safety do not mix well. This unhealthy combination tends to appear in advanced training formats, and is especially prevalent when peers train together. So-called alpha males often regard the firearm safety basics as being inapplicable to themselves. Any

violations of firearms safety might be incorrectly viewed as a right of entitlement due to their vast experience. This is always a bad call. Bullets cannot distinguish between experienced and novice shooters. Irrespective of who you may think you are or what you have accomplished, safety protocols apply to you just as much, if not more so, than the first-time shooter. There is not a single human out there that has not made mistakes, is not making mistakes, or will not make mistakes in the future. A true professional sheds his ego when he works with firearms. If anything, he thanks those that have pointed out a discrepancy in his safety protocols. Set aside the ego and you will ensure your safety and lose nothing in the process.

# SECTION V
# BASICS

“The importance of learning solid basic skills cannot be overstated — this lays the foundation for all else that follows.”
—Brett McQueen

## TERMINOLOGY

**Handgun** refers to any firearm that is designed to be held and operated by either one or two hands and that has no shoulder stock or other support mechanism.

**Pistol** refers to any semi-automatic ("self-loading") handgun.

**Revolver** refers to a handgun with an exposed rear-loading rotary cylinder/firing chamber mechanism.

**Cartridge** refers to the assembled combination of bullet, case, primer, and propellant.

**Bullet** refers to the projectile part of a cartridge.

**Semi-automatic** refers to a firearm operating mode in which, when the firearm is discharged, the empty cartridge case is automatically removed from the weapon's chamber and a fresh cartridge is inserted, and which permits only one round to be fired per trigger press.

**Fully automatic** refers to a firearm operating mode in which automatic reloading occurs as described above and which permits multiple rounds to be fired per trigger press.

**Dominant eye** refers to the eye whose visual input naturally takes precedence. Usually, (but not always) this eye is on the same body side as your dominant hand. To determine eye dominance, open both eyes, extend your right arm out directly in front of you and hold the right thumb straight up and align it on an object. Close the left eye. If the object remains centered on the right thumb you are right eye dominant. The opposite holds true for left eye dominant individual.

**The firing hand** is the one which holds the pistol and whose finger presses the handgun's trigger.

**The firing support hand** is that hand which supplements the firing hand. If this hand is the only one to hold and fire the pistol it is still referred to as the firing support hand.

**The firing arm** is the arm attached to the firing hand.

**The support arm** is the arm attached to the support hand.

## THE THREE GUNFIGHTING BASICS

To excel in any endeavor requires a solid grounding in its basic concepts. Imagine a professional golfer attempting to hit an arrow-straight three hundred yard drive without knowing know how to properly grip the club. But he can do this, consistently, because he mastered the basics. At some point in the past, the Naval Flight Demonstration Team, the Blue Angels, had to master the basics before they could perform flight maneuvers with wings overlapping three feet and only eighteen inches apart.

Learning the basics can be dull, repetitive, and time-consuming, yet they are the spawning ground for everything that follows. The basics must become automatic, like a reflex action, so that when needed they come into play without conscious effort. Nothing about shooting is instinctive. Instincts are inclinations and reactions that we are born with. Humans have very few instincts, and based on the evidence shooting clearly isn't one of them. Shooting is a learned and practiced skill. Shooting also requires diligent practice to maintain a skill level.

I am often asked what type of training course is the best preparation for a real-world gunfight. Without exception I respond "A course that focuses on the basics." Might I need advanced techniques to solve a tactical problem? Perhaps, but ultimately it is the basics which will carry you through.

When I train advanced classes and groups involving complex scenarios, there is always a review of basics nestled within. They should be revisited as often as possible. Without the basics there is no solid ground from which to advance.

**The basics of gunfighting are:**

- **Manipulation**
- **Marksmanship**
- **Mindset**

Manipulation refers to weapons manipulation, which entails the safe, effective, and efficient operation of whatever firearm is used. This includes grip, stance, trigger press, draw, re-holstering, the low ready

position while standing or moving, loading, unloading, reloads, chamber check, etc. On a higher level, weapons manipulation includes, among other things, one-hand firearms operation, malfunctions, high-speed moving target engagement, shooting on the move, varied positional shooting, transitions from one weapon to another, low level light techniques, barricades etc.

Marksmanship entails the fundamental actions that enable you to consistently fire a weapon and strike your intended target. It is hard enough to do this consistently while holding still and shooting at a static target in comparatively calm settings on the firing range. But real opponents move, and you may as well. Furthermore, real opponents can return fire. And real opponents may present only a small portion of themselves, perhaps at acute angles, as a potential target. You may have to shoot from an unusual angle or from an unconventional body position. Real opponents may be obscured in low light conditions. There might be objects interposed between you and the opponent. In short, shooting and hitting what you intend to hit can be a complex proposition, but the chances of success can be greatly increased through an application of basic techniques.

Mindset, or more specifically combat mindset, is the self-imposed psychological condition that allows you to circumvent such distractions as fear, trepidation, or indecision and make rational decisions without hesitation, and to act with a directed forcefulness which will carry you through a gunfight. Without a combat mindset, everything else you bring to bear in such situations is greatly undermined and can even be rendered useless. Of the three essential elements listed here, it is the most important.

Each of these three basic components—manipulation, marksmanship, and mindset—work upon and within each other to successfully resolve a gunfight. They must be rapidly and flawlessly integrated with one another, and when they are, they become synergistic. One could possess the proper mindset yet lack the physical skills (manipulation and marksmanship) necessary to stop a threat. One could possess polished weapons manipulation and marksmanship skills yet lack the mental preparation and resolve necessary to prevail. I am personally aware of cases where technically skilled shooters became mentally unraveled when shots were fired in actual conflict. Mastering one basic gunfighting component without the others is useless in the real world. One

must have all three basic skill sets working in concert with one another. In the following sections we will dissect these basic skills.

# MANIPULATION

## Pistol Fit

If you really want to be confused, just ask 100 firearms dealers or read 100 different authors which pistol is the best. You'll get a hundred different answers. Just remember that a gun dealer is not necessarily a gunfighter; his job is to sell guns. A sales pitch which sells pistols over the counter or through glossy articles may not be in your best interest on the streets. As well, writers may not necessarily be gunfighters; I imagine very few are.

As far as pistols go, there is no one right answer for every shooter, just as there is no one car or set of golf clubs perfect for everyone. You must choose a pistol based on your specific needs and expectations. Above all you should choose a pistol that is well-made and reliable; your life may depend on it. Remember, you get what you pay for. And of course it should be a caliber that will serve you well in a gunfight. Nothing less should be accepted.

So—how to cut to the chase? First, understand that manipulating any type of pistol is easier, safer, and more secure when you use a model that is suited to your own hand, but it is crucial when speaking of a fighting pistol. Throughout years of ITTS classes we have lost count of the number of individuals that have put hard-earned funds down on a pistol that simply did not work well for them. Some have been virtually unmanageable in practical scenarios. An improperly-sized or configured pistol will cause you to 'fight' your pistol rather than work with it. A gunfight is not the place to try and adapt to an impractical weapon.

I can shoot most pistols fairly well but the pistol that best fits me and that I feel most 'locked into' is the single-action, semi-automatic 1911 Colt styled pistol in .45 caliber. I have used them in actual shootings with great effect so perhaps I am biased. This particular pistol model truly feels as if it is a part of me and I can really 'get behind it' when I shoot. This is based on my body structure, physical ability, and experience, which is all unique unto me. I have taught many very skilled shooters who favor other pistols. The choice is always highly personal, but should always be made with a critical eye towards practicality. Finding a pistol that fits your hand isn't solely a matter of grip size. The surface controls—such as trigger, slide

lock lever, safety lever or safety/decocking lever, and magazine release—should be readily reached and operated.

Within many units, be it military, government agency, or law enforcement, there are mandated weapons. Certain modifications may be allowed, such as altering the stocks to enable proper trigger manipulation and pistol fit or perhaps a trigger refinement, yet this is usually not the case. In such situations you will have to accommodate as best you can. The only practical advice that I can give is to work hard to overcome any difficulties posed by a mandated pistol. This may entail a tremendous amount of dry practice to develop muscles to properly operate the weapon.

Another innovative method (which can be time-consuming and frustrating) is to push for a change within the unit or agency. A prime example is the LAPD. A small group of us fought for well over two years to allow all LAPD officers to carry the .45 auto pistol if they so desired. This was a significant upgrade from the issued 9mm handgun, the only allowed semi-automatic caliber at the time. Our proposal was for the officer to personally purchase the handgun, attend a comprehensive three-day transition course, and subsequently qualify with it. For two and a half years this proposal was met with resistance at every turn, and remained dormant on the Chief's desk. In the aftermath of the infamous North Hollywood shootout, when all the dust had settled, the Chief suddenly announced to the world that the LAPD would now transition to .45 ACP caliber pistols. I had previously warned the command staff that one day we might pay for an ineffective caliber and sure enough, it had come to fruition. The 'urban rifle' program then took off as well. If you do push for change then expect resistance and be prepared for a long uphill battle. But in the end it will be worth it if it saves one single life.

**Changing Pistols**

Speaking of pistol fit—in my thirty years on the LAPD, I transitioned from a four-inch Smith and Wesson .38 caliber revolver to a six-inch Smith and Wesson .38 revolver, then to a 1911 Colt .45 auto, then to the double-action 9mm Beretta, then to the double-action .45 Smith and Wesson 4506 and then, to the .45 Glock, and finally I went back to the .45 caliber 1911-type LAPD SWAT Custom II by Kimber until I retired. The department's philosophy changed, policies changed and the units I worked in throughout the years varied as to their dictated weapons selection and I

had to change with them. The pistols varied in size, they recoiled differently, they reloaded differently, they shot differently, and each one had its own unique ‘feel’. A double-action auto is distinctly different than a single-action auto and both of these are distinctly different than the revolver and so on. It took about two to three months of working through all the different drills and scenarios that we ran before I felt that the pistol was a ‘part’ of me. Work with your pistol so that it becomes an extension of yourself, and then you can accomplish some truly remarkable shooting with it when it truly counts.

# SCOTT'S DUTY PISTOLS OVER THREE DECADES



LAPD Issue S&W mod. 67 4" .38 Special

S&W mod. 68 6" .38 Special

Personal Carry SWAT Colt .45 Auto Series 70

Beretta 92F 9mm

S&W 4506 .45 Auto

Glock Mod. 21 .45 Auto

Colt Series 70 .45 Auto Re-Worked Ted Yost

Kimber .45 Auto LAPD SWAT Custom II

## THE GRIP

First some terminology reminders; the ‘grip’ is what the shooter applies to control the pistol. The removable piece or pieces that cover the sides of the frame are properly termed stocks.

The precise hold on a pistol is dependent on a number of factors: the type and size of handgun, the size of the shooter’s hands and the manner one is using the handgun at the time. Although modern pistol technique ideally calls for a two-handed pistol grip, there are times when a one-handed grip is needed, such as when a hand is injured or when using certain flashlight/handgun techniques. This volume will deal with the two handed grip. Therefore I will describe the firing hand grip in detail, followed by the support hand grip.

**Firing Hand Grip**

A pistol should be grasped firmly with the dominant hand (which therefore becomes the firing hand) as if applying a firm handshake, yet not so hard as to induce muscle tremor into the pistol itself. The fingers should be held together, not splayed apart. (If one envisions doing a pull-up the fingers are placed together for greater strength as opposed to splayed.) The web of the hand should as high up as is possible on the radiused (sic) back strap. The back strap of the pistol is located to the rearmost position of the frame and is curved in towards the main body of the pistol. The centerline axis of the bore should ideally be placed in a direct line with the forearm. This correct hand position will properly place the centerline axis of recoil force (which occurs within the barrel) directly into the forearm, upper arm and subsequently into the upper torso. The farther down the frame/stocks that you hold any handgun or the more ‘off-center’ the grip is from recoil force, the more the recoil will tend to rotate the muzzle up and back and also raise the entire arm. This would only serve to reduce recoil control and the ability to make rapid follow-up shots. It will also cause the pistol to ‘skew’ in the hand during firing sequences.

Ideally, the recoil force should be directed into a straight in-line force directly back into the shooters upper mass which thereby provides the most strength and control. With practice, this proper positioning of the hands and fingers will seem secure and very, very firm. You will notice an

appreciable difference in the control of recoil force especially in rapid fire sequences. To sum up the general concept: seat the pistol deep in the palm and get as high up and as straight ‘on-line’ into the pistol as is possible. It is simple and it works.

The other general concept is for the thumb of the firing hand to be fairly straight and extended forward, parallel to the frame. Depending on the pistol model, the thumb’s precise position can vary. On 1911’s the thumb is intentionally bent to lay flat atop the thumb safety. There are too many pistol models and hand sizes to cover every one, but I can address a few common models. The general concept with the firing thumb is to use it to the greatest benefit to control recoil.

With Glocks and other pistols lacking frame or slide mounted safety controls, the thumb can simply be extended along the frame or the slide, at whatever angle provides the most control.

With Beretta and Smith and Wesson’s double-action semi-automatics, the firing hand thumb should be placed directly below the de-cocking lever, preventing the lever from moving downward, which then disallows the pistol from being fired.

With Colt 1911-type pistols and others with a thumb safety interfaced high on the frame and indexed into the slide, the firing thumb should be placed on top of the thumb safety during the firing process and pressing down firmly. At the low ready position or any other position other than in a firing sequence, the firing thumb exerts only ‘butterfly’ pressure against the thumb safety while it contacts it. Placing the thumb below the safety lever of such pistols has proven disastrous in the field when the shooter’s thumb has inadvertently rotated the thumb safety into the “on” or upward position during a firing sequence or, the shooter has failed to disconnect it when attempting to fire. With the firing thumb placed atop the thumb safety this entire firing fault is circumvented. This is a perfect example of a seemingly insignificant detail of technique having profound implications in actual gunfights. Remember, during the firing process, the downward pressure exerted against the thumb safety is always firm. This is a readily acquired skill.

Regarding all pistols, some shooters let their thumbs press against the slide, while others believe this can impede its reciprocation on the frame. On some pistol models I will ‘flag’ my firing support thumb,

keeping it entirely out of contact with the slide yet pressed against the firing thumb. I have never had the action fail to cycle on a combat-caliber pistol with the firing and firing support thumbs pressed against the slide or one another. In my experience, unless the thumb is exerting overly significant pressure or the pistol is so dirty or improperly lubricated that the slide's movement is already sluggish, pressing against the slide is not an issue.

Be aware that for some pistols, such as the Beretta 92F or 1911 styled pistols, when right-handed shooters position their firing hand thumb against the slide as described above, the thumb may inadvertently press down on the slide lock lever, which can prevent the slide from locking back on an empty magazine. As with so many things, this is a trade-off. I opt for more pistol control in a gunfight versus the possibility of the slide not locking back on an empty magazine. I have trained myself as you can, to keep the firing thumb or support thumb above the slide lock lever—barely touching it, as described above and the slide will now lock on an empty magazine. The position of your thumbs is ultimately your personal choice and should be considered when purchasing or shooting a pistol.

# 1911 FIRING HAND GRIP



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Web of hand high into back strap.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE
Firing thumb on top of thumb safety. Fingers firm.



TOP PERSPECTIVE:
Slide aligned straight with forearm.



FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE:
Pistol aligned straight in hand.

# DOUBLE-ACTION AUTO FIRING HAND GRIP



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Web of hand high into back strap.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE
Firing thumb directly underneath de-cocking lever.
Firing grip firm.



TOP PERSPECTIVE:
Slide aligned straight with forearm.



FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE:
Pistol aligned straight in hand.

# GLOCK FIRING HAND GRIP



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Web of hand high into back strap.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE
Firing thumb pressed firmly against slide. Firing grip firm.



TOP PERSPECTIVE:
Slide aligned straight with forearm.



FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE:
Pistol aligned straight in hand.

# REVOLVER FIRING HAND GRIP



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Web of hand high into back strap.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE
Firing thumb on top of stocks. Firing fingers firm.



TOP PERSPECTIVE:
Barrel aligned straight with forearm.



FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE
Pistol aligned straight in hand.

## SUPPORT HAND GRIP

With the firing hand properly in place, you can now increase your control by placing your support hand on the gun. The fingers of the support hand should firmly wrap around the fingers of the firing hand, and ideally they'll will mesh, or lock onto, the grooves formed by the firing hand fingers. Do not splay the support hand fingers, and do not place the support hand's index finger to the front of the trigger guard. Doing either of these things weakens the grip and thus your control over the pistol. Placement of the support index finger to the front of the trigger guard can skew the pistol off-line during firing. Again, envision doing a pull-up where the fingers are unified for more strength. For most pistols, if the hands are positioned properly then the base of the pistol will be completely surrounded and thereby contained by the two hands for 360 degrees. You will have locked the pistol into a vise for all intent and purpose.

The thumb of the support hand should be extended forward, just below and in front of the firing hand thumb, more or less mimicking its angle. In some cases it may be 'flagged' where it presses against the firing thumb. The firing support thumb should be as high up alongside the stocks, frame, or slide of the pistol as is possible for a number of reasons. The thumbs provide an additional controlling force as do the fingers and palms of the hands. The closer to the centerline axis of recoil that the thumbs are placed then the more control they exert over this force. Every bit of force which we can exert to control the pistol we should use and so it is with the thumbs.

**Grip Summary**

By diligently practicing the proper positioning of the hands and fingers on your pistol it will be firm and secure during firing sequences. Your pistol will seem to become part of you, as if it were an extension of your arms and hands. You will notice a great improvement in overall control, 'feel' and 'oneness' with the pistol especially during rapid-fire sequences, allowing more rapid pistol realignment (read sights) for successive shots.

# 1911 SUPPORT HAND GRIP



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Firing thumb on top of thumb safety. Support fingers firm.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Support hand overlapped. Support thumb along side of slide.



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Support fingers overlap firing fingers.



FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE:
Pistol is firmly locked into hands.

# DOUBLE-ACTION AUTO SUPPORT HAND GRIP



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Firing thumb directly underneath de-cocking lever.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Support hand overlapped. Support thumb along side of slide.



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Support fingers overlap firing fingers.



FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE:
Pistol is firmly locked into hands.

# GLOCK SUPPORT HAND GRIP



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Firing thumb pressed firmly against slide.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Support hand overlapped. Support thumb along side of slide.



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Support fingers overlap firing fingers.




FRONTAL PERSPECTIVE:
Pistol is firmly locked into hands.

## SHOOTING STANCE

Stance refers to the position of the rest of the shooter's body—head, arms, torso, legs, and feet.

There are two basic shooting stances: the Weaver and the Isosceles. As with all stances, the difference between the two refers more to the position of the arms and their interaction with one another in conjunction with the shooter's upper torso than with the foot and leg position, yet many people traditionally lump the two together. That's valid, but I place more emphasis on the arms and torso and their interrelationship with one another than the position of the legs and feet.

Quite a bit of controversy swirls around shooting stances. One school of thought emphatically states one thing and another school purports that their stance is the only answer to all things tactical. So who's right? In truth there is no one 'right' stance. Many shootings occur from unconventional positions; if you can conjure up an unconventional firing stance or position, then it has probably been used at some point, somewhere, in an actual shooting. The Weaver stance has been around for quite some time. So has the Isosceles. There are others that are variants of these as well. I use and advocate the Weaver (especially the ITTS modified Weaver) stance because it fits quite well with the bladed interrogation position which any decent street cop will utilize when confronting a suspect. It places the gun side away from a suspect and is a readily defendable position in retaining a pistol. I shoot quite well with it, and because I have used it for such a long time I am quite comfortable with it.



**Classic Weaver Stance**

In a classic Weaver stance the feet are about shoulder width apart, maybe slightly wider. The foot on the support hand side is closer to the target, both feet pointed somewhat downrange, roughly parallel to one another and not splayed, which tends make a less stable platform. Body weight is equally distributed on both feet, allowing the shooter to rapidly move in any direction. The legs may be bent slightly at the knees or not at all or a combination thereof. The firing hand side of the shooter's torso is angled slightly away from the intended target.

With a proper grip on the pistol (see section on Grip), straighten your entire firing arm as much as possible, locking the elbow. This creates nearly linear bone-to-bone connection from firing hand to the mass of the upper torso, much like the stock of a rifle, providing excellent absorption of recoil energy and therefore increasing pistol control.

# CLASSIC WEAVER STANCE



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Body upright isometric tension applied.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Somewhat Aggressive.



FRONT PERSPECTIVE:
Standard Weaver.

Locking out the firing arm has another benefit: it places the sights on the same focal plane and at the same distance from the shooter's eyes every time. Such consistency allows rapid, accurate shooting. In contrast, a common fault of many shooters is bending the elbows. This results in inconsistent sight position and focal plane, and a reliance on variable muscle tension as opposed to strong, consistent bone structure to control recoil.

The support hand, positioned properly over the firing hand (see section on Grip), pulls back against the firing hand and arm which is pushing forward. This imparts isometric tension between the two hands and arms which in turn, further locks the firing arm into the upper torso. The support arm elbow should be kept bent down and in towards the body, which keeps the backward pull of the support arm more in line with the outward thrust of the firing arm. This increases rigidity and helps direct recoil into the shooter's body.

Some might state that the Weaver stance opens up the entire support side of the body facing towards an opponent. A proper Weaver stance does not open the support side of the body all that much. (See frontal photo of ITTS Modified Weaver.)

**ITTS Modified Weaver Stance**

Through the years I have modified my stance into what I now term the ITTS Modified Weaver. Foot placement is the same as the classic Weaver with the following modification which I have found very effective. I break my forward facing leg slightly at the knee while keeping my back leg straight. I angle my upper body from the waist up in and towards the target at approximately a five degree angle.

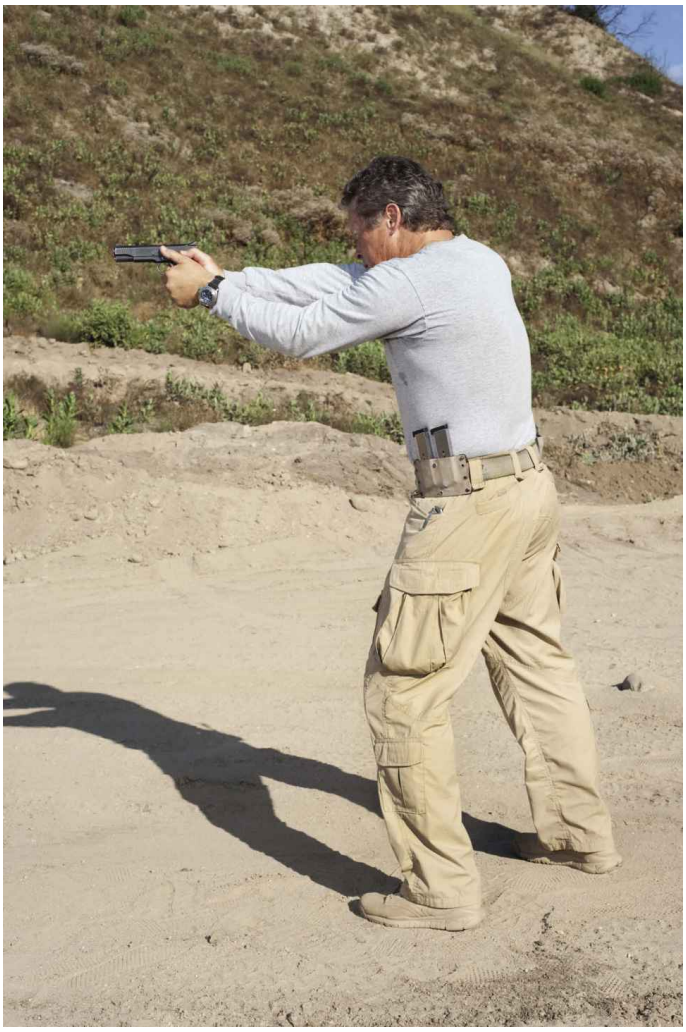
This is a very physically aggressive position. It really puts the body behind the pistol and recoil is cut down with this position more than any other that I know of.

In the ITTS Modified Weaver stance you have figuratively locked the pistol into a vise and then locked that vise onto an extremely stable platform. The firing platform is set at the optimum angle to absorb any backward thrust. This solidity allows rapid realignment of the pistol in fast firing sequences, and an advanced shooter can 'race' the pistol yet still obtain very accurate fire.

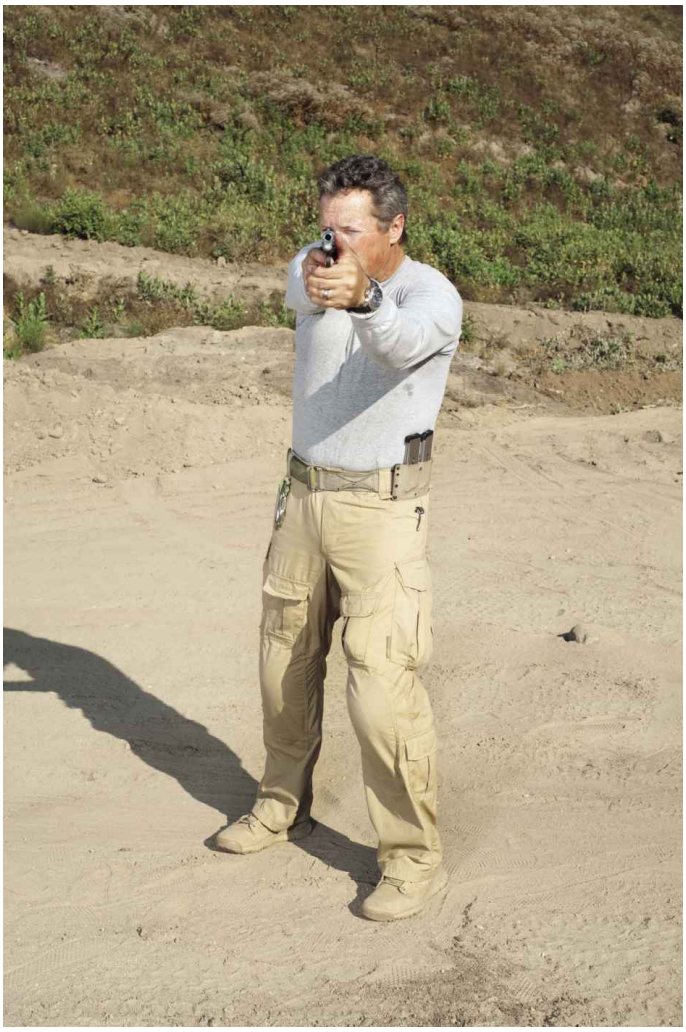
# ITTS MODIFIED WEAVER STANCE



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Front leg slightly broken at the knee. Back leg straight. Upper body canted towards the target about 3 to 4 degrees. This is incredibly strong and effective. It puts the shooter behind the pistol!



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
Shooter is strongly positioned to counter recoil.



FRONT PERSPECTIVE:
The shooter is placing his body aggressively behind the pistol.



OVERHEAD PERSPECTIVE:
Illustration of the clean lines formed by the ITTS Modified Weaver.

**Isosceles Stance**

Some shooters favor the isosceles stance. Here the body faces straight or squared to the target. The feet are spaced shoulder width apart (possibly a bit more than shoulder width) and the weight of the body is pressed forward on the balls of the feet. The upper body is leaning forward, knees slightly bent. Both arms are equally extended in front of the shooter's torso, placing the pistol on the body's centerline axis. Isometric tension from pushing with the firing arm and pulling with the support arm is still utilized, but the support arm elbow is not bent down and in towards the body; instead it mirrors the firing arm position. The isosceles is popular in the military because it maximizes protection provided by current front facing body armor, including the frontal trauma plate, while minimizing exposure to the soldier's sides, where current military vests traditionally lack the side protection that police vests have.

The isosceles can be an effective stance and I really don't get wrapped around the axle debating the merits and deficits of the isosceles versus the Weaver stances.

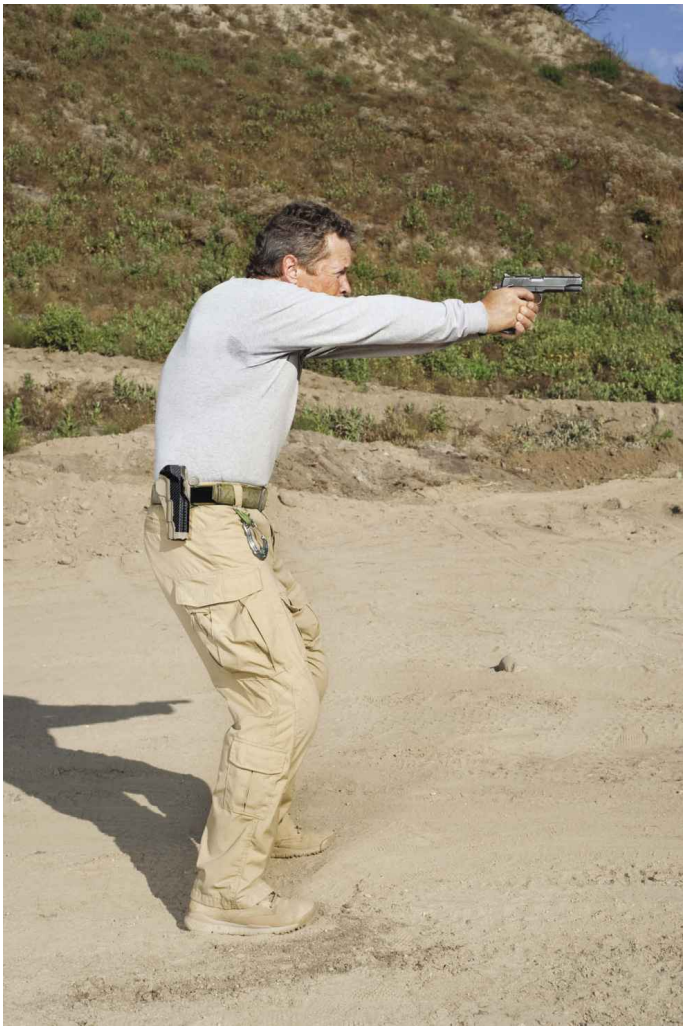
**Shooting Stance Summary**

In a gunfight there is often no way to utilize either of the classic shooting stances. Shootings have occurred from every conceivable unconventional position that you can envision. In a vast number of shootings, the subject of stance—on which so many people have mired themselves in controversy—would be of a purely academic nature. I have studied, consulted and testified on many, many shootings throughout the United States and studied many hundreds more. I have learned a lot from these cases, many of which have required hundreds of hours of thorough investigation. I don't know if I have yet come across an actual shooting case in which a picture-perfect classic stance was used. LAPD officers have shot while wounded, while standing on one foot or one knee, while on the move, while lying on their backs after being knocked down, while aiming up and down flights of stairs, while seated in a vehicle, or while aiming beneath a vehicle, (the North Hollywood shooting is a classic example of the latter and those three SWAT officers I had worked and trained with while in SWAT.)

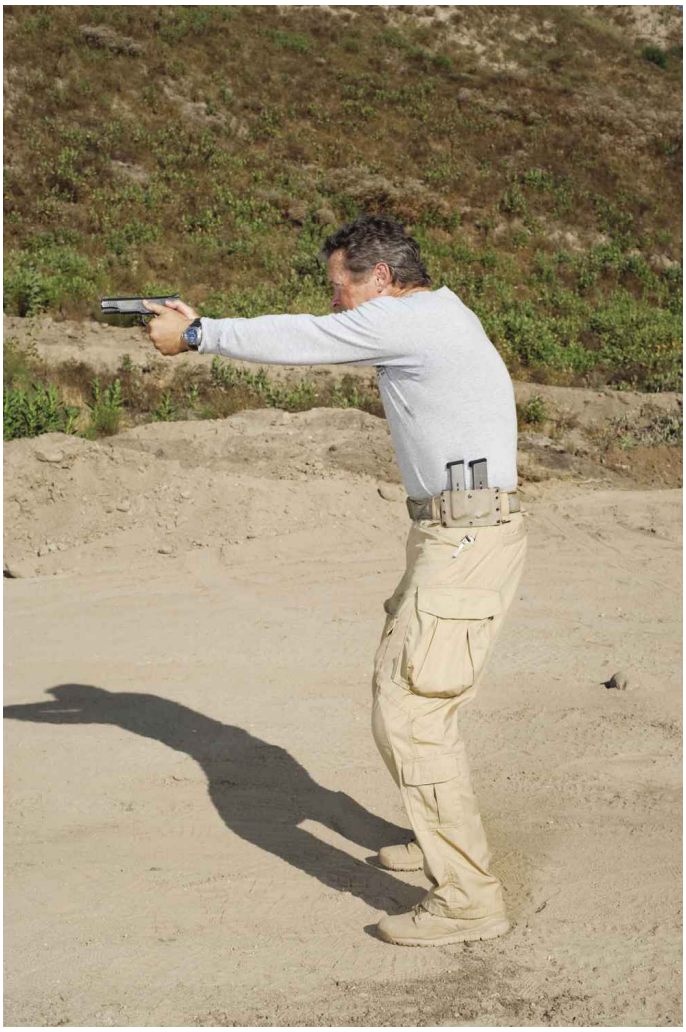
In any case, if a shooter fires well from a chosen stance and that stance adapts to various training evolutions effectively and consistently,

then I pretty much leave him alone. If it’s not broken, there’s no need to fix it—it works for you!

# ISOSCELES STANCE



RIGHT PERSPECTIVE:
Slight lean of upper body toward target. Arm straight.
Isometric tension applied with arms.



LEFT PERSPECTIVE:
The left side is a mirror image of the right when utilizing an isocoles.



FRONT PERSPECTIVE:
Body squared toward target.

## MARKSMANSHIP

Marksmanship entails the fundamental actions that enable you to consistently fire a weapon and strike your intended target precisely where you intend to strike. Consider this: to shoot any hand-held weapon accurately, all one has to do is to align the sights with one another and in turn superimpose them on the intended target, and then press the trigger without disturbing that alignment! (This does not encompass allowances for bullet drop, wind and elevation sight corrections used at extreme distance.) Remember this thought as you continue on. Even though the statement above does not encompass all the complexities inherent in a gunfight, it is nonetheless perhaps the most succinct summation of shooting I can think of. I have used this concept in every class for well over two decades and it seems to be a concept that everyone can readily comprehend.

# SIGHTS

## The Purpose of Sights

In a gunfight only hits count. There have been a number of documented and tragic shootings on the LAPD alone, where suspects have shot officers who did not strike their opponent first. This is just one department, by the way. When you take into account all the other departments and military groups and civilians throughout the ages who have failed to accurately strike their opponents first and stop the threat and have then paid the ultimate price due to ineffective fire, it is sobering.

One must strive to make every round count. This is the goal that one trains toward. Rather than hope that a round or two from a series of shots fired strike the target, it is far better to hit with the first round. Ideally every round fired will hit the target.

As detailed below, I had practiced ‘instinctive’ or ‘point shooting’ during my Academy training and for several years thereafter. After having fired a number of rounds on the shooting range to ‘warm up’, and depending on the day or how well my body was in sync with the pistol at any given moment, I could pull off some fairly decent shots. Yet it was never consistent. As a result, I always felt uneasy with my shooting ability until I was in Metro where they emphasized the use of the sights.

In real shootings you simply can’t afford to miss and to my knowledge, no one has ever been injured or physically incapacitated by a loud noise. What one needs is a repeatable and reliable means of hitting what you want to hit - when you want to hit! When utilized properly, the sights allow for this capability. For most individuals, constant live fire training is unavailable, since most people do not have unlimited access to a shooting range nor an unlimited supply of ammunition to practice with which ‘instinctive’ or ‘point’ shooting requires.

A Note on the use of sights; there are many, many different ways of utilizing the sights. Some will erroneously assume that the use of sights denotes a highly stylized and refined application of the sights consistent with slow fire bulls-eye target shooting. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As you read along this will become self evident.

## Historical Notes on Using Sights

When I joined the LAPD in 1976, we were taught to draw the pistol with the strong hand as we crouched down low and dropped to our left. This was performed using a .38 Special caliber Smith & Wesson 4-inch stainless steel double-action-only revolver. (By the way, double-action-only means the handgun's hammer cannot be manually cocked and then fired by pressing the trigger. It can only be fired with one continuous press that both cocks the hammer and then subsequently releases it, firing the gun. We called this 'neutering' the gun.) Our .38 Special cartridges used 158-grain solid lead round-nosed bullets. (This cartridge configuration provided abysmal performance in the field and we knew it.)

The rationale at the time for dropping low and to the left was that suspects traditionally shot high and to the right. Dropping low and left took us out of their line of fire. I suppose in retrospect that it sounded somewhat logical and it did look cool. There was, however, one problem: there never was, nor has there ever been, anything to substantiate the claim of a suspect's shot placement traditionally being high and right. But back in that day and age one ever questioned the instructors, most certainly not on the LAPD! To question anything back then was just this side of sacrilegious. Rational questions were usually avoided as the entire Academy class ultimately paid the price for questioning illogical dogma. I always pondered whether or not I would get the one bad guy out there that shot low and left instead of high and right and I'd simply step into his line of fire rather than away from it were I to apply the Academy's shooting techniques.

At some distances we were taught to bring our firing support arm up in front of our chest at an angle which crossed the heart so that any incoming bullets would be slowed down as they passed through the arm should we be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This was a holdover (so we were told) from the era that preceded the advent of concealable body armor. At other distances both hands controlled the pistol and the arms were bent at the elbows and positioned just above the waist. Whether with one hand or two, the pistol was held out in front of the body somewhat lower than the chest area yet slightly above the waist and our arms were bent at the elbow. We shot by looking well over the pistol itself, focusing on the target, and 'feeling' where the pistol was pointed. It all looked somewhat sexy and quite reminiscent of the Dragnet and Adam 12 television show era, but in truth it was an ineffective technique. Sometimes you'd get on a

good string of fire and things fell nicely into place and the rounds found their mark. At other times the rounds would impact well off the intended mark. It was extremely frustrating to say the least. Had the target been moving, or small, or had non-combatants been in close proximity then you might just be out of the ballpark altogether. This technique, at least to me, was not a good one to bet on in a gunfight. Essentially, the philosophy at the time was that you might be on target depending on the day and time you ended up in one of these situations and then again, you might not. That was just great!

When we were allowed to use our sights—which was at about ten to fifteen yards, (depending on the instructor) our accuracy increased appreciably. We did not seem to lose any time in using our sights either. One fact was readily apparent to all of us. The pistol sights actually worked! I once had the audacity to use my sights up close at about seven yards. Things went swimmingly and I was hitting center target and doing so in very fast times when I was suddenly slapped hard in the head and knocked silly by one of our instructors.

"You can't use your sights this close, Reitz!" he bellowed. Well, I just had, and it worked and my shots were centered, but discretion being the better part of valor, I went back to their technique until my time at the Academy ended.

What the LAPD Academy taught back then was their version of 'instinctive' or point shooting. The theory is that one 'instinctively' attains a certain body position in gunfights and 'instinctively' points or aligns the pistol on the intended target in such affairs. The attendant philosophy is that sights are not usable under the stress of a gunfight. On this point I strongly disagree. I have used my sights in each and every one of my shootings to great effect and I have observed first hand others who have used their sights in shootings to great effect. Beyond my firsthand experience, there have been countless others who have, through the decades, used their sights to great effect in shootings.

Instincts are things you are born with. Shooting is not instinctive; it is a learned and practiced skill. If it were otherwise, one could simply pick up a pistol and shoot it well based on nothing more than instincts. Are there those that have successfully used a so-called 'instinctive' or 'point' shooting technique? Yes there are. But they practiced extensively to acquire

their skills so they were not really ‘instinctive” at all but rather learned and practiced skills. Some of the old timers (going back to the 1920’s -1970’s) utilized this instinctive style of shooting successfully, but these men lived with their guns every waking moment. Shooting was their life and they devoted vast amounts of time to developing their skills—much more than most people reading this ever will.

The bottom line is that if a target is more than a few feet away, or moving, or small, or obstructed by intermediate objects requiring careful shot placement, then one will probably find it extremely hard to hit using instinctive or point shooting. In such cases (which often occur in the real world) the use of the sights is not only effective and preferable, it is a necessary, learnable, and repeatable skill.

My goal from day one in the Academy was to gain entrance into SWAT. One first had to be admitted into Metropolitan Division to apply for the legendary ‘D’ Platoon, or SWAT. Just getting into ‘Metro’ itself back then was quite a feat.

Metro were the big boys on the block. They worked all over the city in the worst of areas at the worst of times and took on the most dangerous assignments. They executed all the high risk search warrants, conducted bank stake outs, worked V.I.P. and Presidential and Vice Presidential protection details, serial killer cases and high risk crime suppression, just to mention a few of their capabilities. Any eventuality that the LAPD as a whole was either unprepared for or ill equipped to respond to, Metro handled. Back then the members were all hand-selected and you had to really be on top of your game as an officer in order to gain entrance into its ranks.

The competition was fierce, but I made it—I was there with the boys from ‘114’. (The 114 came from the fact that the original door of Metro’s room in the old Georgia Street police station - now the site of the Staples Center—had that number.) The number 114, is the radio call sign for Metropolitan Division—the only LAPD division that uses a numeric identifier.

Because of their assignments, Metro shouldered the greatest risk of becoming involved in gunfights. And the men in this division really were gunfighters; some of their gunfights were legendary. If I were to listen to anyone concerning the subject of gunfighting, it would be them. And it

turned out that Metro had a much better way to ensure hits on a consistent and repeatable basis, even under stress. They actually used their sights!

Training in Metro soon confirmed what I already believed: that one could use the sights in either a deliberate manner, or if necessary, a very rapid manner dependent on the situation. If the target was generous in size and close in distance one could still use the sights at extreme speed and achieve far better hits than those we had obtained in the Academy. The sights did indeed work! Why the Academy hadn't adopted this technique at the time, I don't really know. Metro used their sights and they had marked and repeated success in the field as a result.

**Can I Really Use The Sights Under Stress?**

Can a shooter use the sights rapidly in life and death encounters? Absolutely!

Can a shooter perceive the sights in stressful conditions? Absolutely!

As you continue training, you will find that a 'sight picture'—that is, the perceived image of your pistol's sights superimposed on the target—can be obtained at varying speeds and degrees of refinement. For example, at extended distance or during slow fire (when necessitated) or when very precise targets are engaged (as in a hostage situation) the sights might be very precisely aligned and visual focus on them extremely acute. In other words, the picture is refined.

There are situations where a refined sight picture is not necessitated. For instance, at extremely close distances, with an immediate threat where a fairly large target is presented. That is, during what is termed close quarters combat. In the close quarters combat situation, the short distance and size of the target allows for a degree of error in the sight alignment and sight picture. Another situation might be under extremely fast-paced shooting conditions where time is of the essence. In these situations you will use a flash sight picture. (If I am 'racing' the pistol at full speed, then my sight picture is what I term a 'super-compressed' sight picture.) With a standard flash sight picture, the sights are positioned directly at eye level (more on this subject later), and they may be slightly out of alignment, and they may be slightly out of focus. The shooter's eyes are positioned directly behind and viewing through, the rear sights even though the front and rear sights may not be precisely aligned.

In using a flash sight picture, the instant that you perceive that the sights are pretty much on target the shot is broken. The two are virtually simultaneous with one another. Think of it this way: sights/target/trigger/now—all in the blink of an eye. Done properly and practiced correctly, this can be extremely fast and effective. Again, this is always predicated on the afforded target area and distance and the complexity of the problem which is presented to the shooter.

Amazing speed can also be achieved with the sights using what I term the 'super-compressed flash sight picture', in which both eyes are open and the sights and shots on target are virtually simultaneous with one another. The shooter is looking through the sights rather than over them yet doing so in time frames which are measured in the tenths of a second.

Depending on the shooter's skill, the problem confronted, and the sighting method used to deal with it, the actual time for sighted fire will vary tremendously. I may be able to, draw, fire and strike a silhouette target at a hundred and twenty five yards in about 2.5 to 3.0 seconds, but I am using a much different method of sighting than I would at a distance of five yards against a static, full sized frontal silhouette.

There really is no one singular way of using the sights but rather a base line of sight alignment and sight picture from which to start. Everything else will evolve from this point. When you start out, you should concentrate first and foremost on the precise alignment of the sights and the overall sight picture. This will ensure that you experience firsthand the efficacy of sighted fire. You will be able to accomplish excellent, repeatable, shooting which in turn instills confidence that the technique does in fact work. If you rush this process you may become discouraged at first. You must first fully mentally process and physically incorporate the application of sight alignment and sight picture, or you will not have a solid foundation to build advanced skills upon.

To sum it up, pistol sights are a simple system, but it's a system that works well. Sights can be used at extremely fast speeds if necessary and they can be applied under real world conditions. I know this for a fact. I have used them in each and every one of my shootings. Hundreds of others that I have taught and debriefed have used them as well in documented shootings. Thousands of others have done so as well. Do not buy into the myth and false premise that sights cannot be used in real gunfights. This is

absolute and pure nonsense! When someone makes such a blanket statement it clearly illustrates their ignorance of the many different methods of actually utilizing the sights. The use of the sights is a learned and practiced process and nothing more. Absolutely nothing about shooting is instinctive—it must be learned and practiced.

To someone who says sighted fire is neither realistic nor obtainable in gunfights, I would pose the following question: In just what circumstances can the sights not be used? At what target distance, at what target motion, at what target size, at what target angle, under what target lighting conditions, and under what shooter impediments and debilitations can the sights not be used? When they respond, “What do you mean?” I know I am addressing someone with little or no real-world experience.

**Eye Dominance**

The subject of eye dominance is one that has perhaps been more overstated than understated. A dominant eye is simply the one eye that the shooter defers to over the other eye when shooting a handgun. It does not necessarily mean that the dominant, eye possesses better visual acuity nor focuses faster etc. It is simply the eye that the shooter seems to prefer over the other. My left eye has better visual acuity than my right eye and yet I predominantly use my right eye to the deference of my left. In point of fact, no one can predict which eye may or may not be available in a gunfight. Things transpire in the field that can take one or the other eye completely out of the equation. This being said it is prudent to learn to use either eye despite the fact that you may predominate one over the other the majority of the time. Consider the following; if the sights are properly aligned with each other and then centered on the target then it really doesn’t matter which eye perceives this correct sight alignment and sight picture now does it?

To determine eye dominance extend your right arm out directly in front of you and hold the right thumb straight up and align it on an object with both eyes open. Close the left eye. If the object remains centered on the right thumb you are right eye dominant. Now close the right eye and the thumb will shift to the right.

The opposite holds true for the left-eye dominant shooter. In reality, the subject of eye dominance is more academic in nature than anything else. Over the course of time you will learn to use cross dominant (right-hand

shooting—left-eye aiming and vice-versa) techniques to cover as many variables as may present themselves. You may also learn to shoot a weak-hand and weak-eye (or non-dominate eye) technique as well, to further encompass any eventualities that may befall you in a gunfight. We are not overly concerned with eye dominance although we do demonstrate it in our classes. Learn to shoot with either eye to cover as many eventualities as are possible.

**Closing One Eye**

As with anything taught by an instructor, a student naturally wants to know just how the instructor accomplishes what it is that he or she is teaching. This is a fair question and one that I would ask myself. If the target is close and liberal in size and I am ‘racing’ the gun then I will have both eyes open and the pistol is directly in front of my right eye. In other words my right eye is looking directly through and is positioned directly behind the sights. My left eye is opened and views the entire scope of the problem even though my right eye is concentrating on the sights to a greater degree.

If I am going for a more precise shot then as the sights are just coming into view relative to my right eye, I will close my left eye a fraction of a second before this occurs. Personally, this forces all my concentration into the sights with minimal distraction. I already know where the target is and I have formulated the decision to fire. This technique of closing my left eye allows for a purer mechanical application of the sights with my right eye. It avoids visual distractions. The instant that the shot(s) have broken (and I have incorporated follow-through) and the pistol, is coming off-line, then I open my left eye again to assess the situation. Some individuals can shoot with both eyes open throughout the entire shooting process irrespective of the degree of complexity of the shot. Personally, this is somewhat distracting as I have one eye focusing on one specific focal plane and the other eye focused to an infinite focal plane. With this process on more demanding shots I personally don’t ‘feel’ or perceive the same pure, technical line up of the sights that I do when I close my left eye which then forces all my visual concentration into my right eye.

**Notes on Sight Picture, Settings, and Combat Accuracy**

**Sight alignment** is the relationship of the front to rear sights.

**Sight picture** is the shooter’s overall view of the aligned sights superimposed upon the intended target.

Your sights will always be in a constant state of motion when you are aiming a hand-held firearm. Even with heavy sniper rifles which traditionally are supported and fired from a prone position, the very heartbeat of the shooter is translated into the rifle and is actually visible through high-powered optics. The reason that sights are always in a constant

state of motion is due to the fact that you are a living and breathing entity. A shooter will never achieve a complete and total motionless state; accept the fact that body movement will always be present and transferred to your pistol, causing the sights to move relative to the target and in relationship to one another. It's worth noting that while this motion is readily apparent at first, it will become less and less noticeable as you continue in your practice although it will always exist to some degree.

Due to the body motion described above, the alignment of your sights with respect to one another – that is, irrespective of the target – will also be in a constant state of flux. In other words since no one can hold a pistol absolutely still, the alignment of the front sight with the rear sight will always be shifting high, low, left and right. If you are not focused on the sights then you cannot perceive this misalignment, which in turn you cannot correct for. However, even if you do correct for misalignment, your sights will always remain in some state of motion. Thus the key to shooting is to continually make corrections in sight alignment as you press the trigger. When the shot breaks, the sights, although in motion, were as close to perfect alignment as was possible for that particular shot due to the fact that you visually maintained your sight alignment and sight picture throughout the entire process. Remember: You cannot physically correct for an error which you cannot visually perceive.

**Sight Settings**

Target pistol sights are usually adjusted for a 'six o'clock' hold that a target shooter might use on a round bullseye target of known size placed at a known distance. Because of these 'knowns', the target shooter can adjust his sights so that when the front sight just touches the bottom center of the entire bullseye target—a juxtaposition that is fairly easy to discern visually—the bullet will impact center of the bullseye at a specific distance. This allows the shooter to observe the entire circular bullseye target however; bullseyes do not shoot back and bullseyes do not alter their shape and dimensions. Suspects do. Bullseye shooting is very formalized and given to liberal time frames—gunfighting does not grant such liberties.

**A combat sight setting** is used in gunfighting, however. With a combat sight setting the sights are generally adjusted so that for a target at 25 yards distance, the bullet will impact precisely centered where the top center of your sights overlay the target. Where the sights are positioned—the bullet

impacts. This setting is used because a human target is irregularly shaped, and may be engaged at varying distances, yet you need to place a bullet fairly exactly within that irregular shape. In other words you need the bullet to strike where you need it to strike plain and simple! It is much easier and faster to do this if you can intersect the top of the aligned sights with the desired impact point, and not have to offset the sights to correct for bullet impact. Gunfights are difficult enough without having to throw in another degree of complexity.

As noted above, combat sights are usually set so that the point of aim coincides with the point of impact at around 25 yards; that is, they are 'zeroed' at 25 yards. This setting is used for at least two reasons. First, theoretically most gunfights occur within twenty five yards. Actually, it's a pretty good rule of thumb to follow and I see no valid reason to change it. Second, when pistol sights are zeroed at this distance, they are also pretty closely zeroed for any distance less than 25 yards as well—even as close as three feet from the shooter. Beyond the distance of 25 yards the bullet will gradually start to drop, so at those greater distances you will need to aim slightly higher than your chosen target impact point, or you can raises the front sight slightly over the rear sight.

A combat sight setting, to summarize, will direct the bullets within an acceptably small group size directly where they are intended to be and when the sights are properly aligned. This is the only sight setting that should ever be used in a fighting pistol. For most engagement distances this sight setting eliminates guesswork and calculations as to where one should aim or position their sights in the midst of a gunfight.

**Combat accuracy** is what I'm generally talking about in this book when I speak of accuracy. Combat accuracy applies to shooting done within short time parameters against possibly fleeting, moving, or partially obscured targets within the context of a life or death encounter. With combat accuracy, bullet groupings ('group size') at 25 yards can be measured in terms of several inches. This is practical and realistic within a combat setting, with the exception of more precise shooting that might be called for in a hostage situation. Target accuracy deals with the inherent mechanical accuracy of a weapon absent the stress of combat. Target shooting transpires within very controlled conditions absent the stress of a life-threatening encounter. To borrow and paraphrase from Bruce Lee, "Paper targets don't

shoot back!" With target accuracy, group size might be measured in fractions of an inch at 25 yards.

**Proper Combat Sights**

**Non-Adjustable Sights.** On a combat pistol I avoid adjustable sights as adjustable sights seem to always be relied upon to accomplish one thing—work their way out of adjustment. I use only 'hardened' sights. They are not adjustable in the conventional sense of the term. In order to adjust properly hardened target sights it will require tools to adjust them. Typically, hardened, steel sights fit into dovetailed slots positioned to the rear and front of the slide, and can only be moved by using a special tool or by striking them with a flat-headed punch. Once adjusted it is possible to use adhesives or staking pins to keep them from ever shifting. Such sights are generally of robust build, typically fabricated from steel. After setting my front and rear sights, I will use a dot of dark red nail polish to mark both of them. That way I can pick up any one of my pistols, readily discern if there is a break in the nail polish, and if not then the sights are still good to go. It's a relatively simple fix to an otherwise potentially fatal problem. We have literally lost count of the number of shooters in our courses throughout the years who have had misadjusted sights and were completely unaware of it. In a gunfight this could prove disastrous—you could do everything right yet still miss your target. To pay such a high price and not employ such a simple fix is foolish. Mark your sights.

The vast majority of combat sights are relatively large in size so that even under stress a good sight picture can be readily discerned. Sights on a target pistol may have smaller or perhaps odd-shaped dimensions which are appropriate for target shooting—not for gunfighting. I avoid diminutive sights as they may be hard to pick up in the stress of the moment.

**Combat Sight Design**

I prefer straight lines and sharp right angles. Proper sights incorporate such lines and angles. The human eye seeks symmetry. The human eye can readily discern parallel planes and right angles. There will always be new innovations in pistol sights such as rounded beads, and 'V' notched rear sights etc. However, for the vast majority of field encounters the traditional squared, rear sights aligned with a squared front sight will be more than appropriate. I also highly recommend that any combat sights incorporate the use of night sights (Tritium) in the event that the mechanical

sights (the metal front and rear sights) are not discernable due to low level light.

**Using the Sights**

How does one actually use the sights?

1. First, be sure you're looking through the sights, not over them. Your pistol should be at eye level, and you should be looking through the rear sight and not over it. Your visual focus is on the sights as they align with one another and the relationship of that alignment with the target.

2. Achieve the proper sight picture, which has four key elements.

• The front sight should be in crystal clear focus. You should be focused to the extent that you can discern every nuance and physical characteristic of the front sight itself.

• The rear sight should be somewhat diffused and the target even more diffused. Reason: the human eye can only focus on one focal plane - that is, at one distance—at one time.

• The top of the front sight should be perfectly level with the tops of the rear sight, and there should be two equidistant bars of light on either side of the front sight relative to the rear.

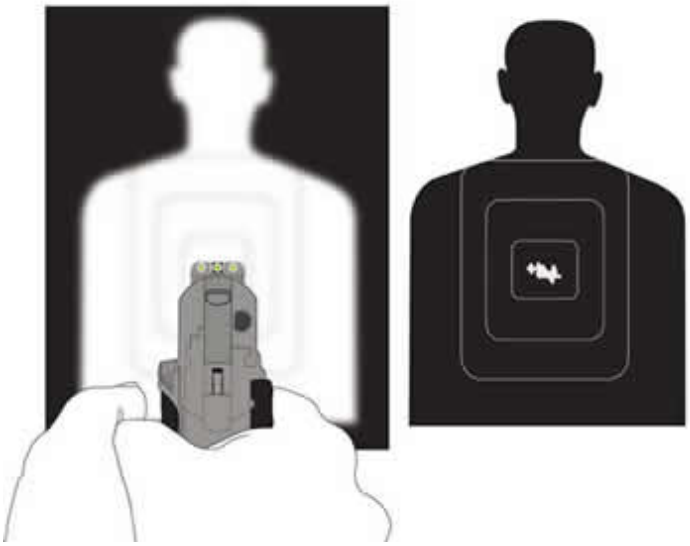
• The top center of the front sight should 'intersect' the point on the target which you want the bullet to impact.

As mentioned previously, the precise alignment of the front and rear sights and the speed with which this is accomplished will always vary with the degree of complexity of the problem with which the shooter is faced. As an example; a silhouette target is fifty yards distant and I am already at the low ready position. As I bring the sights up to bear on the target I am already shifting my focal plane to where I know the sights will be positioned in the next fraction of a second. I then must then very precisely align the sights as I conduct the proper trigger press and incorporate follow through (see section on follow through) after the shot is broken. All of my visual concentration on the sights in their alignment relative to one another and their relationship

to the target is very exacting. I am focused on a mechanical perfection void of any other distractions whatsoever. I am, trusting in the mechanics (in this case the sights) with 110% concentration! On another problem, I am only five yards distant to a full frontal silhouette and I am holstered and the threat is immediate. I have already made a conscious decision that I must apply deadly force in a timely manner. As I am drawing, I am shifting my focal plane to where I know the sights will be when the pistol is at full lock out in the next fraction of a second. When the sights are rapidly brought to bear on my intended area of the target and I have a ‘compressed’ sight picture (even if the sights are not perfectly and precisely aligned with one another) the shot(s) are broken. Time is of the essence and it is not necessary to impress my opponent with superlative accuracy but rather that the vital center mass area of the target is quite simply, struck as soon as is possible.

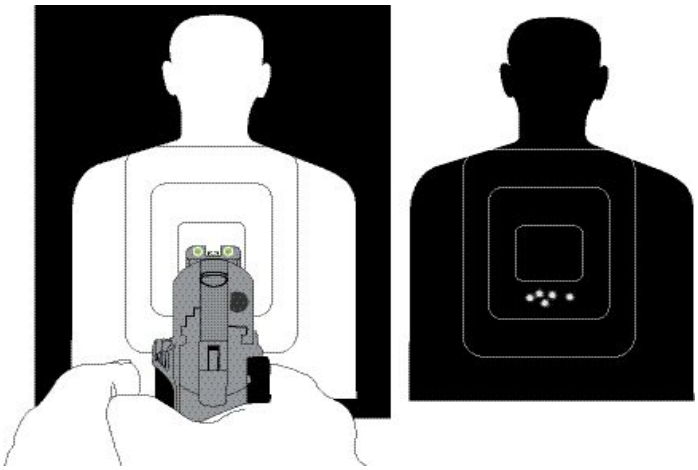
These are just two examples of the many wherein the sights are utilized yet they are utilized in very different fashions due to the problem with which I am presented. All of gunfighting is adaptation at speed and the use of the sights also ascribe to this philosophy as well. The use of the sights is always adaptable, always flexible and ever changing. Again: there are many, many different methods of employing the sights and the proficient shooter will always adapt the use of the sights to the problem.

# SHOOTERS PERSPECTIVE OF SIGHTS, BOTH CORRECT AND INCORRECT



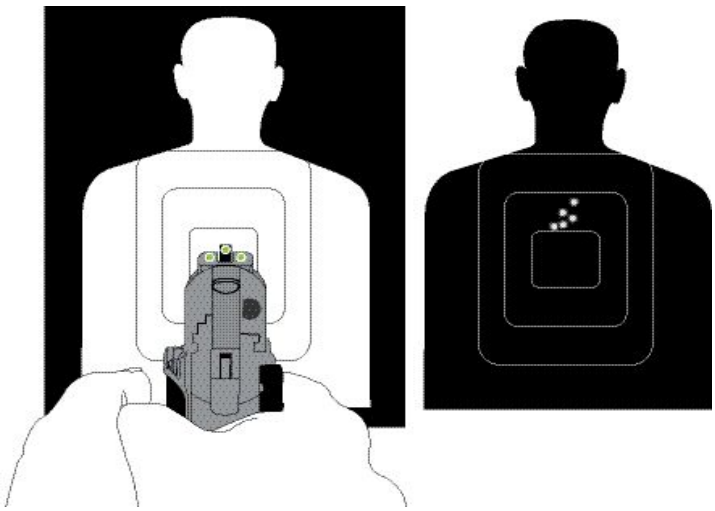
Correct sight alignment, focus on front sight. Top of front and rear sights aligned with equidistant bars of light on either side. Front sight is crystal clear, rear sight slightly diffused, target is blurred.

**Remember: focus on front sight.**

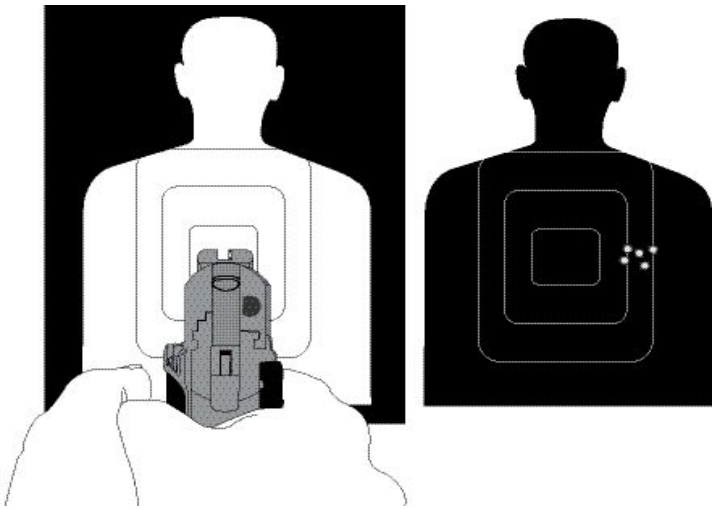


Incorrect, front sight too low.

# SHOOTERS PERSPECTIVE OF SIGHTS, BOTH CORRECT AND INCORRECT

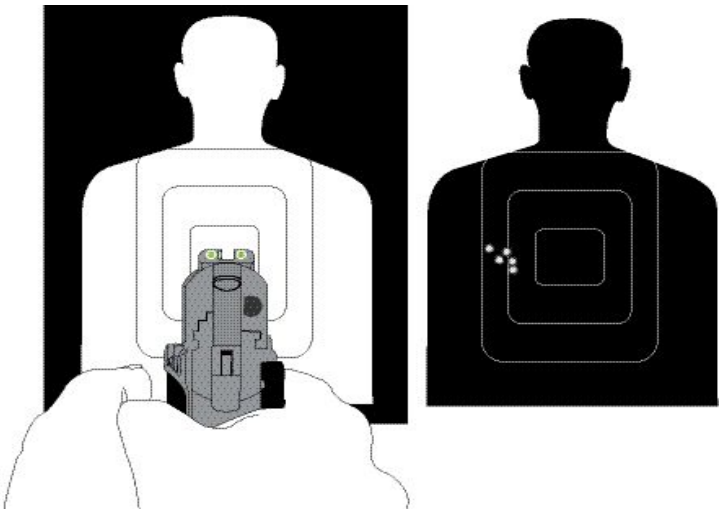


Incorrect, front sight too high.

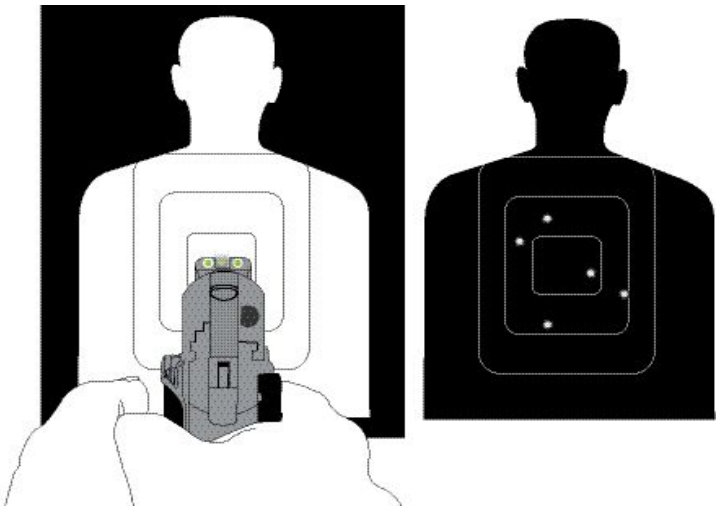


Incorrect, front sight too right.

# SHOOTERS PERSPECTIVE OF SIGHTS, BOTH CORRECT AND INCORRECT

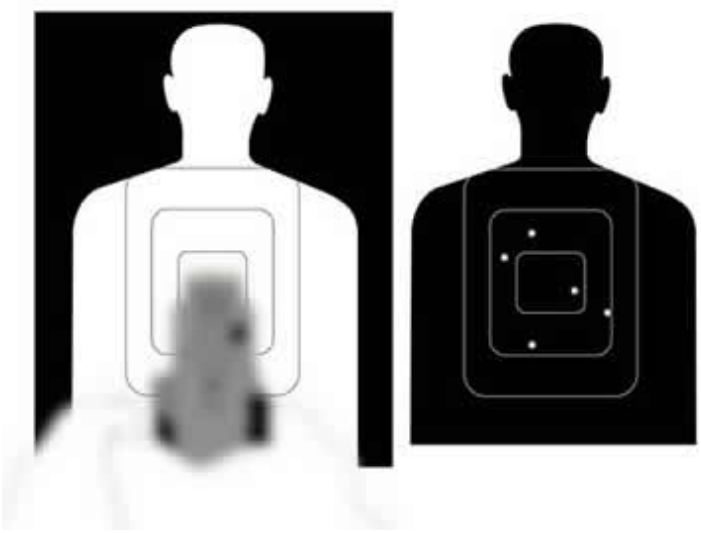


Incorrect, front sight too left.

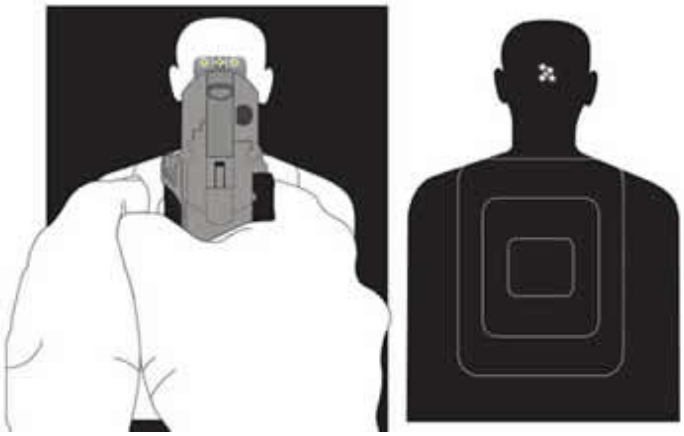


Incorrect, focus on rear sight, imprecise front sight alignment.

# SHOOTERS PERSPECTIVE OF SIGHTS, BOTH CORRECT AND INCORRECT



Incorrect, focus on target, impossible to verify sight alignment.



Correct, focus front sight, center head.

## TRIGGER PRESS

Shooting is actually a fairly straightforward process. In order to shoot any firearm well, all one has to do is simply align the sights (assuming they are set properly) with the intended target and press the trigger without greatly disturbing that sight alignment! On the surface this appears to be relatively simple, right? Then why are there so many misses in some of the gunfights that we hear about? Many of the shootings which I have studied or testified upon involve numerous misses— sometimes far more misses than hits. There are many reasons for this.

Unrealistic and improper training prior to a field encounter is one reason for so many misses. If you are not trained for what you will actually encounter in the field then how can you be expected to perform properly? This would be analogous to learning to drive a stick shift Volkswagen Bug and then being thrown into a Formula One race car at Le Mans and wondering why you crashed and burned at the first turn. You trained to one standard when another, much higher standard was called for! Other reasons include the variety of field situations, making it difficult to train for every possibility. Degradation of fine motor skills under stress also contributes to flawed performance in the field. There are many, many other reasons as well but for now however, we will concentrate on one of the most common faults in field shootings which lead to missed shots: the improper trigger press, especially when applied in a stressful situation.

The skills discussed in this book are all perishable. They must be practiced again and again over a protracted period of time, and they must be practiced enough to be reliable under the most stressful of conditions. None of the shooting skills are automatically ingrained in us. They are trained to, refined and practiced. The difference between gunfighting skills and those of a golfer, skier or musician is that you are betting your life on gunfighting skills. Do not delude yourself with the nonsense that one lesson from ‘so and so’ will transform you into an accomplished gunfighter. This has never been the case and never will be. Nothing that I know of in life which is worthwhile can be learned from one simple lesson. It takes time and dedication to become proficient.

Gunfights are messy and violent and generally they do not allow for warm-ups or to achieve a psychological ‘happy place’ before you get into it. The pressure to make correct decisions is intense and such decisions will

come at a rather fast and furious pace. Bear in mind the following fact: fine motor skills—that is, precise control over finger and hand movements—may be some of the first skills to ‘go south’ so to speak. Therefore the trigger press which must often be of a refined nature is a prime candidate for degradation. Regardless of how solid your stance is and how well the sights are aligned, a bad trigger press will make a total mess of things. The trigger press is extremely critical to effective shooting and is especially so in gunfighting.

A perfect, pristine trigger press is simply one that, while being applied, does not cause the pistol to move in any way, shape or form. The trigger press is applied in a straight, rearward direction with no lateral distortion whatsoever. The trigger is not being ‘raked’ to one side or the other. It is a trigger press—not a trigger pull. You are pressing against the trigger not pulling on it and there is a difference. The connotation of a proper trigger press is that amount of pressure smoothly and steadily applied by the shooter against the surface of the trigger straight to the rear to cause the sear to release. Technically, the ‘trigger pull’ refers to the amount of mechanical pressure required (measured in pounds) to cause a trigger to travel and then release the sear allowing the hammer or firing pin to then strike the primer.

This ‘non-movement’ of the pistol as the trigger press is applied can be very closely approximated by applying a smooth and steadily increasing pressure to the trigger as the pistol sights are continuously adjusted to maintain alignment with the target in the time span available for taking any given shot. When starting out, the shooter must by necessity take the time to ensure that the trigger is slowly and evenly pressed. You need to be patient and not rush the shot as this will only serve to spoil it. One of the best mental images as an aid to accomplishing a good trigger press is as follows. Imagine a thin glass rod in a vertical position, fixed at both ends. Now imagine your trigger finger pressing against this rod, smoothly increasing the tension until the glass rod suddenly breaks at its shear point. This could be referred to as a ‘surprise break’ and the term is applicable to the unexpected release of the sear in a pistol trigger mechanism as well. The release of the sear allows the hammer to move forward striking the firing pin which in turn, strikes the primer and ignites the powder and sends the projectile through the bore. A perfect trigger press is ‘crystalline’ in nature and pure. This trigger break arrives without anticipation. The trigger press is simply smoothly and

steadily applied until the trigger ‘breaks.’ It is true that with much practice you will develop a fairly good feel for the point where the trigger break will occur with a particular pistol yet you must still always avoid anticipating the shot.

The opposite of a good trigger press would be ‘mashing’ or jerking the trigger, which in turn disrupts the pistol’s orientation in space which then misaligns the sights with the target. There are many causes for jerking or mashing the trigger, such as stress, degraded motor skills, anticipation of the shot, anticipation of recoil, anticipation of the gunshot report itself, and finally the erroneous belief that you can suddenly jump on the trigger when the sights are properly aligned without moving the pistol. Remember that there must be a level of delicacy and deliberate finite skill applied to the trigger press even in violent confrontations.

Many shooters don’t realize that they’re jerking or mashing the trigger, even when the downrange results make it obvious. (This is usually evidenced by impacts low of the intended mark.) They state emphatically that their barrels are burned out, their sights are misaligned, the pistol itself is inherently inaccurate, or they have a bad batch of cartridges or massive wind shear exists between themselves and the downrange target. If you can name the excuse—I’ve heard it. If I then shoot these same pistols and the result is a tight grouping of the shots, and the shooter is utilizing the sights properly it is then clear that the shooter’s trigger press is defective. The reason that most shooters can’t identify an improper trigger press is due to the fact that the onset of recoil is instantaneous. In other words, the instantaneous recoil of the pistol to the rear or towards the shooter ‘masks’ the fact that the shooter did in fact jerk or slam into the trigger which causes the muzzle to dip. In essence, the recoil has instantly pushed back into the trigger mashing or jerk exhibited on the trigger at the exact same moment and hides this trigger press fault. The slighter the ‘mashing’ the less noticeable to the shooter that this shooting fault is.

We incorporate a specific ‘hands-on’ drill with shooter’s who exhibit a trigger press fault. We allow them to fire the pistol without them specifically knowing the condition of the pistol as we conduct this drill. In other words, they do not know whether the pistol will discharge or not. What invariably occurs is that the shooter’s pistol dips down appreciably if they improperly press the trigger on an empty chamber. This improper trigger

press is now readily apparent and we can then take the necessary steps to correct the problem.

What portion of my trigger finger should I use to press the trigger? This will always be dependent on the model of pistol being utilized and the dimensions of the shooter's hands. If at all possible the pad of the trigger finger should be utilized. This renders a more definitive 'feel' and accurately vectored pressure delivered to the trigger. Since the trigger on semiautomatics only has to move a fraction of an inch when staged in a single action mode (on my 1911 styled .45 auto, the trigger only moves 1/16th of an inch to release the sear) I do not need anything more than the pad of my finger to exhibit fine pressure to the trigger. On double action revolvers though, the interior portion of the first joint of trigger finger would be properly utilized as the trigger travel is much longer (about an inch on some models) and the finger pressure required is considerably more to cause the trigger to travel the entire trigger stroke. The interior of the first joint of the trigger finger on a revolver affords more controlled leverage than the pad of the finger. Thus between the single action semi-auto and the revolver, there are two different positions of the trigger finger on the trigger.

On double action semi-autos the first shot is double action only and every shot thereafter is in a single action mode as the hammer has been set to a cocked position after the first shot is fired. The pad of the finger should be utilized for both the double action trigger press and all single action trigger presses thereafter. It is impractical to utilize the interior portion of the first joint of the trigger finger for the first shot and then re-configure the trigger finger to position the pad of the finger on the trigger for follow up shots. Most gunfights will simply not afford the shooter such forgiving time latitudes.

There are, also what I term hybrid triggers which are not quite single action and not quite double actions. They are a hard to describe mix between the two. On such pistols I would still recommend the pad of the finger as the optimum choice of trigger finger placement.

In any regard, one should always opt for that finger placement which affords the greatest control and greater feel for the trigger. With a little bit of experimentation all shooters can find this optimum trigger finger placement irrespective of the pistol employed. Within many agencies a designated pistol is required for field use and it may not 'fit' the shooter's hand very

well. LAPD experienced this with smaller stature officers utilizing the Beretta 92F. The only advice I can give is that you must practice diligently to work yourself into the pistol or, push for a change in those pistol models allowed.

**Trigger finger position without the formulated intention to shoot**—If, your sights are not lined up on your target and you do not intend to shoot, your trigger finger should be positioned outside the trigger guard and extended straight forward along the pistol frame, pressing against it, directly above the trigger guard.

**Trigger finger position when intending to shoot**—If your sights are lined up on your target or are just shy of this point, and you are intending to shoot, your trigger finger should be on the trigger itself with all slack removed from the trigger. The trigger finger and its exact position upon the trigger is determined by the type of trigger action your pistol has.

# TRIGGER FINGER PLACEMENT



1911 TRIGGER PRESS
Pad of trigger finger presses straight to rear.



DOUBLE ACTION AUTO TRIGGER PRESS
Pad of the finger presses straight to the rear through the long double action trigger.



GLOCK TRIGGER PRESS
Pad of trigger finger presses straight to rear.



REVOLVER TRIGGER PRESS
Interior portion of first joint presses straight to the rear.

**Different Pistol Actions**

**Single-action pistol**—With the single-action pistol, the hammer (or firing pin) must be cocked manually before firing, either by articulating the slide to the rear or manually thumb cocking back the external hammer. After that, a single press of the trigger releases the sear and fires the pistol. Thus, only one mechanical action is accomplished by one trigger press. With single-action only pistols, every trigger pull (measured in pounds) is mechanically identical.

When shooting single-action pistols, such as the .45 caliber Colt model 1911, the first pad of the index finger of the firing hand should be applied to the center of the trigger.

This position delivers a more precise feel and control over the trigger regarding both pressure and length of travel. Remember, we want the most sensitive control possible over the trigger, even when working at high speed under stressful conditions. With pistols such as the 1911, we truly need such control. The 1911's trigger slack (free movement of the trigger until resistance is met) is about 1/16th of an inch, and after this trigger slack is removed, the trigger has to move approximately another 1/16 of an inch to release the sear. If one considers that slack is not part of the actual trigger press, the extremely short trigger press length requires a maximum trigger 'feel' which the first pad of the trigger finger then provides.

**Double-action pistol**—With double-action pistols, the initial shot requires one complete press of the trigger which both cocks the hammer and then releases the sear, firing the pistol. Thus two mechanical actions are accomplished by the initial trigger press. Because the first trigger press cocks the hammer, the length of trigger pull is long and usually comparatively hard. After the first round is fired the pistol reloads and re-cocks itself, so subsequent trigger presses are comparatively shorter and easier. The trigger itself after the initial shot, will generally be re-set farther back as the hammer is now cocked—and the trigger is now positioned closer to the rear of the pistol—on the second and all subsequent shots.

Despite the difference in mechanical trigger pulls between the first and second rounds fired, for all shots with a double-action pistol it is best to use the first pad of the trigger finger. This trigger finger position allows for an increased sensitivity, control and refinement of the trigger press for all

rounds fired. It is not practical to shift the trigger finger placement on the trigger midpoint during the course of a gunfight.

Therefore, a double-action pistol has two distinctly different trigger presses. All subsequent shots after the initial round fired, would be similar as for those with a single-action trigger. Ostensibly, this double-action-then-single-action mechanism was created partly as a safety measure. First, it allowed the pistol to be carried with a round in the chamber and ready to fire without having to carry the gun in a ‘cocked and locked’ condition, meaning with the hammer in a cocked position and round chambered and the safety placed on, as is often done with single-action pistols such as the 1911 and the Browning Hi-Power. They are carried in this manner because if they were not cocked and locked, the first thing you would have to do to place them into action after drawing, would be to either physically thumb back the hammer or work the slide—a potentially fatal loss of time. Second, the comparative difficulty of the first long, hard trigger pull makes it more difficult to unintentionally press off a shot. I don’t completely agree with this concept as plenty of shooters have unintentionally pressed off shots with double-action only revolvers so the logic simply doesn’t follow.

When a double-action pistol is in the cocked single-action mode, the trigger only has to move a fraction of an inch to fire the pistol. In this mode it is very much the same as the trigger on the 1911-type pistol. For this reason it makes sense to use just the first pad of the trigger finger to press off subsequent shots after the first double-action shot. The shooter has a more precise feel and control over the trigger that way. This being the case, it is preferable for the shooter to use this same trigger finger position on the trigger for the first double-action shot as well. Under stressful conditions, and during the brief 2.5—3.0 seconds that a typical gunfight lasts, it is simply too difficult to use the interior portion of the joint of the trigger finger for the first shot, and then readjust to the pad of the trigger finger for all subsequent shots.

Even with a pistol having an extra-heavy initial double-action trigger pull, the best solution is to use extensive dry-fire practice to develop the muscles of the firing hand and trigger finger.

If a very precise shot is called for and the double-action semi auto has a very heavy trigger, then the hammer may be manually cocked with the thumb of the firing support hand, staging the trigger to a single-action mode.

There is however, an extremely important caveat: this is an advanced technique and some agencies or departmental policies forbid it. Be forewarned that if you use this technique you may have to subsequently justify your actions.

**Hybrid-action pistol**—On some comparatively newer pistol models, there is now a hybrid trigger that is not quite double-action only and not quite single-action only. It's somewhat of a 'hard to describe' mix of the two. The firing pin on these pistols may be partially or fully cocked after a round is chambered and pressing the trigger simply completes the cocking sequence and then releases the sear which allows the pistol to discharge. A hybrid action trigger pull feels longer and softer than for the classic single-action pistol, and the sear is released without feeling a distinct trigger break. The trigger reset may be hard to 'feel' distinctly. The only way around this is to conduct dry practice until you are able to develop a 'feel' for this particular hybrid trigger. With hybrid trigger actions every trigger pull is mechanically the same. Again, I opt for the first pad of the index finger over the inside portion of the first joint of the index finger when pressing off shots with such trigger pulls.

Another subject which bears mentioning is trigger slack. All firearms possess some degree of trigger slack; that is, a free, rearward trigger movement from its 'at rest' position to the point where firm resistance is met. At the point where all the trigger slack has been removed and this firm resistance is met is precisely when any further pressure on the trigger begins to release the internal sear mechanism which will cause the pistol to discharge. Trigger slack is not nor has it ever been, part of the trigger press. Trigger slack is a mechanical function of the individual pistol's design. Failure to immediately remove trigger slack prior to conducting the actual trigger press itself will cause the following shooting faults; the shooter will race through the slack and then crash into the resistance of the trigger which then moves the pistol resulting in a fouled shot or, the shooter will lose valuable time by slowly pressing through the slack which has no bearing whatsoever on the actual trigger press itself which physically releases the sear.

Different firearm models possess different degrees of trigger slack; you will have to learn the amount your pistol has. Each pistol is unique unto itself. Even consecutive serial numbered pistols of the same model will have

a different ‘feel’ to them and different degrees of slack. More precisely, you will learn how far your trigger finger has to press on the trigger to remove all the slack before conducting the actual trigger press itself which releases the sear. You will learn from diligent practice, just how far your trigger finger has to move forward during a series of shots to reset the trigger without the presence of slack as well.

A final note on the trigger press; the physical trigger mechanism of the pistol can certainly affect performance. Believe it or not, you can shoot a somewhat inaccurate pistol that has a good, smooth trigger more accurately than you can shoot an accurate pistol that has a very bad trigger. When they make pistols, they make a lot of them at one time. Unless you are spending your next vacation money on a top of the line custom pistol, there will probably be some imperfections in the trigger. There may be tool markings or rough and uneven surfaces on the internal mechanisms and bearing surfaces. When you slowly press the trigger you may feel grinding and bumps and perhaps an uneven travel or an excessive heaviness of the trigger. A competent gunsmith can usually correct this problem. In some cases extensive dry practice will smooth out the unevenness of the trigger but that may take a long time. It is better to have the trigger re-worked immediately so you can shoot well from the start.

***A Legal Note****—Some triggers may have an excessively heavy pull due to the manufacturer’s concern over possible liability claims. If you work for an agency which forbids modification of the trigger, then adhere to that policy. Circumventing departmental policies and procedures is never a good idea. In some instances the manufacturer’s distance themselves in litigation from the shooter should they modify a weapon beyond the manufacturer’s specifications. It is not at all unusual in the aftermath of a shooting, for a firearm to be checked for any violation or alteration beyond that which is considered officially acceptable among law enforcement entities. Any modifications to a weapon might have to be justified in the aftermath of a shooting. This is an important fact to bear in mind.*

**The Ideal Trigger Press**

The overall concept of a perfect pistol trigger press, regardless of the type of firearm, is as follows. While continuously maintaining sight alignment on the target, press the trigger straight to the rear in a smooth and continuous motion that imparts no movement to the weapon until it

discharges. Do not suddenly ‘yank’ on the trigger when you feel the sights are aligned. Instead, allow the pistol to ‘shoot itself’, rather than suddenly commanding it to do so. Ideally, you want the trigger finger to work independently of the rest of your hand. It should be a separate entity for those brief periods of time when it is called upon. The grip strength may be firm and powerful yet the trigger finger must be delicate in its application of pressure on the trigger. The situation may be chaotic and violent yet the trigger press is calm and clinical. The trigger finger operates independently of all else that is going on about it. The sights, sounds, and physical acts surrounding you may be intense yet the trigger finger as it presses the trigger must always remain controlled and smoothly applied—even if it is conducted at speed.

Never underestimate the importance of a proper trigger press. Even slight imperfections can result in bad shooting. Were someone to say to me on the range, “Well—I was only a little off of where I intended to hit,” my response would be, “If the target had been partly blocked by a car or wall or other intermediate object then your round would have struck the obstacle rather than the target.” The two or three inches by which you missed the mark on the range can make all the difference in the field. In many shootings about which I have testified the difference between success and failure could be measured in just such small increments. Many shooters will simply accept a mediocre trigger press rather than work to perfect it. Unfortunately, the price of failing to master the trigger press can result in catastrophic failures in the field.

**Trigger Reset**

When a trigger is pressed and a shot is fired the trigger will need to be reset. This means that the trigger must move forward to allow the internal sear to re-engage, allowing the pistol to fire once again. Different pistol models will have different reset distances and a different ‘feel’ when they are reset. The correct method of resetting the trigger between shots is to release the pressure on the trigger after a shot is fired just forward enough so that the trigger ‘engages’ the sear absent, the presence of any slack. In other words, when the trigger is properly reset, there will be an instant resistance to any back pressure placed on the trigger. A common fault of shooters is to allow the trigger to return all the way forward, which now incorporates slack. For subsequent shots the shooter then races through the slack, crashes

into the trigger, and the shot strikes off of the mark. In very extreme cases, a shooter will improperly come entirely off the trigger between shots and then race back through this dead space—strike the trigger face—then race through the trigger slack and then slam into the trigger. The resultant shot will be well off of the mark. A proper trigger reset simply avoids all of this.

The cleaner the trigger reset, the faster the trigger can be effectively manipulated. When we teach shooters a proper trigger reset the results astound them. They frequently state that it feels as if they're shooting an entirely different pistol. The reason why they feel this difference is that they are now properly manipulating the trigger over a shorter distance and with greater control, which provides increased control and refinement with improved downrange results.

For Colt 1911-type pistols or double-action pistols with an exposed hammer, trigger reset between consecutive shots can be safely dry-practiced (conducted with an unloaded firearm) by pressing off the first dry 'shot', then holding the trigger all the way to the rear and thumb-cocking the exposed hammer with the support hand thumb and then releasing the trigger slowly while holding the hammer to the rear. The shooter will feel a 'click' as the sear re-engages and the next dry shot may be conducted. For pistols without an exposed hammer, cycle the slide with the support hand. In both case this cocks the hammer or firing pin. Now slowly ease the trigger out just enough so that it 'catches' the sear. In most pistols there will an audible click and 'feel' when the sear reengages. Do not allow the trigger to extend any farther out than this audible 'click' or physical trigger reset. The pistol is now ready for another dry practice shot. If trigger slack is allowed into the process then the tendency for the shooter in a live fire sequence is to race through this slack. This in turn, causes the shooter to slam into the trigger during a live fire sequence, throwing off the pistol's alignment with the target.

# TRIGGER RESET DOUBLE ACTION AUTO



Pad of finger presses straight to rear.



Hammer will cock.



Hammer will fall—pistol discharges—finger remains in contact with trigger.Slide will begin to articulate to the rear.



Hammer will now be cocked. Finger on the trigger, slack removed by proper trigger reset. Subsiquent shots will be from single action.

# TRIGGER RESET REVOLVER



Trigger finger starts press straight to rear.



Trigger press is smooth and uninterrupted.



Hammer falls—pistol discharges.



Reset trigger with no slack. Finger remains on trigger throughout.

**Practicing Trigger Control**

There is a distinction between live fire and dry practice. Live fire denotes actually firing rounds. Dry practice is the manipulation of the pistol or firearm absent any ammunition whatsoever from the firearm.

When initially learning the pistol, dry practice is invaluable. It allows the shooter to get to know the trigger and other surface controls of his firearm without worrying about a target or background or noise or recoil. The shooter can devote full attention to the mechanics of the pistol, which in our present focus is the operation of the trigger.

Some shooters express concern regarding the hammer falling on an empty chamber and damaging the firing pin. If this is your concern, you can purchase inert or action proving rounds that provide a cushion for the firing pin to strike against. As well as the trigger press drills outlined below, these inert rounds can be used to conduct loading and unloading drills and speed reloading drills.

**Trigger Practice Drill**

With any firearm, before starting your dry practice make sure that it is not only unloaded but that it has been double and triple redundancy checked to ensure that this is the case. Remove all live ammunition from the area. Tell yourself aloud that you are beginning dry practice, and when you finish, tell yourself aloud that you are completely finished with dry practice. Again, it is easier than you can imagine to, conclude a dry practice session, reload the pistol, and then conduct a manipulation “just one more time” with disastrous results.

Here are the steps in the trigger press drill, which should be repeated scores of times, and should be done as an occasional “refresher” over time.

1. Remove all slack from the trigger. Press through any free movement until you meet resistance and then stop immediately.

2. Maintain your sight alignment on a specific target while conducting the trigger press as slowly as possible until the hammer falls or the firing pin strikes. This can take several seconds; be patient—you are learning your trigger. If you do this correctly you will feel every bump, every tiny grind, and every bit of uneven resistance of the trigger travel whatever that resistance may or may not be. Close your eyes and see how long you can extend the trigger press and then feel in your ‘minds eye’ every

portion of the rearward trigger travel before it breaks. Even consecutively serial numbered pistols might feel slightly different from one another so get to know your own trigger.

3. Once the hammer falls do absolutely nothing except stay focused on maintaining sight alignment. There will always be some form of movement of the pistol when the hammer finally falls, but it should be extremely slight, almost imperceptible.

4. Re-cock or articulate the slide, reset the trigger, realign the sights on the target and then hold momentarily.

Unless you initially learn your trigger in this manner, you will never be able to master it at speed. The axiom of learning to walk before you run is applicable here. As you continue to practice, you will gradually increase your trigger press speed yet still exhibit the smoothness which you exhibited absent time constraints. It is very difficult to fine tune a trigger press if all one does is to press the trigger rapidly. You can never learn the nuances and idiosyncrasies of a particular trigger at great speed. This knowledge will only come at a slower speed and then will be built upon from that point.

# FOLLOW THROUGH

## Preliminary Notes on Shot Follow-Through

Of all the subjects relative to shooting, this seems to be the least understood, most ill-taught, if not altogether disregarded aspect, of the basics which we have ever encountered. Shooting is a physical endeavor. Imagine if there was no physical follow-through in a baseball swing, or a football throw, or a golf swing and so on. Nothing would ever be fluid. The baseball player or football player or golfer would attempt to instantly stop or check a certain motion at the very instant the bat or arm or the club had imparted energy to the object. Such actions, absent the incorporation of physical follow-through, would result in jerky, inconsistent physical motions. There would be no reliable or consistent smoothness of action.

Most human beings want to observe the results of their actions as soon as is possible. This would fall into the instant gratification category. In shooting, it manifests itself in the following manner: the shooter draws the pistol, aligns the sights, presses the trigger and fires the shot—then the shooter instantaneously moves the pistol off target during the firing sequence and strains to view the shot. Where did it go? How did I do? Where is the hit? Where's the hole in the target? Did the steel silhouette go down? Did the round get down there? And so forth.

The shooter by not incorporating follow through has interrupted the critical flow of what otherwise would have been a smooth, mechanical continued firing sequence. This will always result in sketchy consistency and potentially fatal, missed shots in the field. The shooter has tried to determine the exact, precise instant that the bullet has exited the muzzle and he no longer exerts any control or influence over its ballistic flight path when he pulled the pistol off target. This is a virtual impossibility as the time frames we are discussing occur in the thousandths of a second and the human brain simply does not compute at such speeds. The only reliable way to ensure that the mechanics of the sights and trigger press will have a positive effect is to incorporate follow through.

Real gunfights and Hollywood's depiction of gunfights are often quite different. In real gunfights you may not see any bullet impacts at all. Expecting to see such impacts and then not seeing them—especially with pistol calibers—can cause some shooters to panic. Do not panic—trust in the mechanics. Low level light conditions, clothing, a suspect's rapid motions

and many other mitigating factors will mask the bullets impact. Even on homicide investigations it can take some time for detectives to locate entrance and exit wounds, let alone allow a shooter to observe them in the midst of a gunfight.

While shooters might grasp this concept intellectually, it takes training and a certain degree of willpower to resist the temptation and not look for the results of your shots as you are firing. Reactive targets—most commonly these are shaped, ballistic steel plates that make a distinctive sound when you hit them and/or fall or articulate—can sometimes increase this temptation, causing the shooter to break away from the shooting mechanics or at minimum interrupt the mechanical focus, to determine if the target was struck or has started to fall. This must be resisted until follow-through has been thoroughly incorporated into the shooting mechanics of each and every shot and even then it may be a temptation.

**What To Expect Of Your Opponent's Reaction**
**(A follow-on to the subject of follow through)**

This is a rather interesting subject. If you have never experienced a shooting first hand what can you expect your opponent's reaction to be? First and foremost I would state the following; expect nothing and expect everything at the same moment. I typically query a class with the following question; "How do you know if you have struck your opponent or stopped your opponent's threat?" The typical answers can run the gamut such as: "If he goes down, if he screams, if you see blood, if he drops the gun or knife" etcetera. On the surface all of these answers are correct and yet they are not correct. Simply because a suspect goes down does not mean he was necessarily struck. Some individuals may scream without being struck. Some individuals may simply drop a weapon for whatever reason without having been struck at all. And observing a bullet's physical impact as previously mentioned, is very difficult. The human body may also sustain a tremendous amount of traumatic damage and yet still be operational. This is not an insignificant fact. A severely disrupting brain shot or spinal cord injury might instantaneously incapacitate a suspect but even here there have been exceptions. In short, you must trust in the mechanics and continue to apply them until the threat ceases and this includes incorporating follow through.

Many law enforcement agencies do not adequately explain the difference between shot follow-through and threat assessment. Threat assessment is conducted after your opponents threat has ceased or otherwise appears to be neutralized, and might even incorporate the expansion your situational awareness to ensure that no other threat exists. With some agencies, shot follow-through may even be an unknown concept, or one that is deemed unimportant. Consequently, many police officers that we have trained throughout the years will fire a round (or rounds) and after each one will immediately pull the pistol off the target to assess the results—with no shot follow-through exhibited at all. The usual result is that their rounds go astray, so they end up assessing misses and not solid center hits and generally the threat still exists.

Threat assessment, must be performed, of course, but only at the proper time, which will come after incorporating shot follow-through for each and every round fired. The erroneous assumption that threat assessment is the same as shot follow-through will only impede a shooter's progress. If follow through is not incorporated into the firing process then most likely, you will have nothing noteworthy to assess anyway! After instilling and incorporating shot follow-through, the officers that we have trained obtain solid hits, yet they can still assess the threat whatever it may or may not be. This threat assessment is also conducted at a practicable speed without the loss of efficiency in solving the problem. It is imperative that you receive training from someone who fully comprehends this concept and can teach to it.

So how do you resist the temptation to check for instantaneous results as you are in a firing sequence? You accomplish this by incorporating follow-through into each and every shot that is fired! You must trust in the mechanics: Sights —trigger press—follow through, for each and every round you ever fire. With every practice round, you concentrate on maintaining the sights on target before, during, and after the shot until it is a thoroughly ingrained process that will carry over automatically in the field. Is the sight picture going to be disrupted when you fire? Yes. Due to recoil, the gun will shift position a bit with respect to the target, and the front and rear sights will shift a bit with respect to one another. Despite this recoil-induced shifting, you must remain focused on the sights and continue what you were doing during the previous trigger press, which is to continually

maintain a proper sight picture. Of course, immediately after your shot you will also reset your trigger in order to press off another round if necessary or desired; trigger reset should also become automatic.

When starting out you must by necessity, exaggerate the amount of follow through you incorporate into the shot. As you progress in your shooting skills the exhibited follow through will come closer and closer to the mechanical follow through necessary to avoid spoiling the shot but you must first start out slowly and extend your follow through so that you experience the beneficial effects of follow through. Oftentimes, a beginning shooter will observe an experienced shooter working at speed seemingly disregard the application of follow through. “He’s not using follow through!” “Yes he is,” I will reply. “Look at his target.” What has occurred is that the experienced shooter has perfected his follow through to such an extent that it is in fact incorporated, but at such a speed and perfection that the untrained eye does not discern it as such. Were you to film the experienced, proficient shooter at normal speed and then slow down the film you would in fact, readily observe follow through exhibited after each and every shot.

**Live Fire Shot Follow-Through Drill**

Start out with a very slow rate of fire while incorporating all the other physical aspects of shooting which we have previously dealt with.

1. Align the sights on a specific area of the target and press the trigger very slowly until the shot is fired.

2. The instant the shot is fired, perform proper trigger reset and stay focused on the sights, maintaining a proper sight picture as if about to fire another follow-up shot at the exact same aimpoint through the exact same hole of the first shot—yet do not fire! Do not look for the bullet holes in the target, and do not look to see if the target went down or physically reacted to the shot. This will very much be an exercise in mental discipline. (I sometimes refer to this mental exercise as ‘Zen with bullets.’)

3. Slowly, lower your pistol to the low ready as you simultaneously remove your finger from the trigger and place it alongside the frame, and only then do you assess the shot. Repeat the process again and again until follow through becomes ingrained and you fully comprehend its significance.

Again—you must force yourself not to shift visual focus from the sights to the target or to observe for holes or impact marks both during and immediately after you have fired the shot.

Does a shooter have to take such deliberate times with each and every shot in a gunfight to ensure proper follow-through? No. Again, you will start out slowly and pick up the pace as you progress. Be patient at the outset and don't rush the process. Many shooters will incorporate a deliberate and slowly-paced methodical follow-through for several shots when they first start out. Upon observing their initial success, they instantly revert to a faster paced application of follow-through. Typically, the shooter finds himself right back at square one. This is caused by bad habits surfacing again when attempting to apply speed. The proper mechanics of follow-through have not yet been ingrained into the shooter's muscle memory. Trust in the mechanics and ensure that you fully understand and appreciate follow-through. Ensure that you can consistently apply follow-through absent speed before you try to open up the throttle.

Repeat this slow-fire drill over and over, concentrating on the mechanics of the sights, then the trigger press, and then incorporate shot follow-through. You will be rewarded with tighter groups and more accurately placed groups. Why is this? Because you have now allowed the pistol to do precisely what it was designed to do and that is to shoot! The pistol shoots itself, so to speak. You, the shooter, are only a guidance platform that simply tells it where and when to shoot. The proper incorporation of follow-through has ensured that the pistol has remained on target before, during and after the firing sequence. Absent the incorporation of follow-through, the shooter will be constantly fighting the pistol and the results will be inconsistent and frustrating. By keeping the pistol on target with the sights aligned and slack out of the trigger on trigger reset in anticipation of a second shot, you are now forcing yourself to incorporate follow-through into each and every shot.

A side note—it is not at all unusual when we have taught low-level light classes that at night our students' shot patterns become demonstrably tighter. This is not because bullets fly truer in the cool night air, but due to the fact they can no longer see the bullet's impact on the target, and they

simply settle down, trust in the mechanics and incorporated follow-through into every shot absent any visual distraction.

## BREATHING WHILE SHOOTING

I personally tend to keep my mouth open and just breathe the same as say— a boxer might do when fighting. This relatively simple process requires little thought or effort and goes a long way towards improving your shooting. Too often shooters will clench their jaws and hold their breath in anticipation of an upcoming evolution or string of shots. This physical action tightens the shooter's muscles and body which in turn, disallows a smooth functioning of the mechanics. Overly taut or tight muscles do not work well in concert with the concept of fluid movement. Breathing allows for a more fluid application of the mechanics so you should very simply—breath!

If you couple this incorrect action (holding your breath through evolutions) with movement and communications and varied positions it only serves to compound the errors. Just open your mouth, breath normally and you will find that it is invariably easier to apply the mechanics.

## THE FLOW OF THE MECHANICS

These are the very basic mechanics of pistol shooting in total;

1. Grip and stance
2. Sights (sight alignment and sight picture)
3. Trigger press
4. Follow through

We delineate these mechanics in the precise sequence in which they are written for a very deliberate reason. Consider the following;

1. You must first grasp and control the pistol.
2. You must align the sights on your downrange target
3. You must press the trigger in order for the pistol to discharge.
4. You must incorporate follow through for any of it to work.

All of these factors are interdependent upon one another. They are also absolutely symbiotic in their nature as regards one another. Disregarding any one of these mechanics will have an adverse effect on shot

placement. Each link of the mechanical chain must be in place and exhibit a uniformed strength.

Each shot fired must have a conscious and deliberate mental effort behind it to be a successful shot. Shooting is a physical act which requires a mental deliberation. This is especially true when applied to gunfighting. Shooting, especially gunfighting is 95% mental and 5% physical. The mental deliberation drives the mechanics. Orienting towards a problem, assessing the situation and responding to it is a pure mental endeavor. The physicality of shooting mechanics is driven by mental deliberation.

At the outset of training this will take time some time to accomplish. Each step of the mechanics will entail a conscious and deliberate mental effort. With time many of the mechanics will fall into a subconscious category. In other words, at an advanced level you will complete many, if not all of the shooting mechanics in a subconscious state. Well after the fact, you may recall each and every physical step which you applied and yet during the event, these elements transpired without your being specifically aware of them. I refer to this as ‘Slotting.’ There is a ‘feel’ of what you are about to physically and mentally carry out. All the elements have ‘slotted’ into place. The shooter can ‘feel’ the grip and muscle tension, ‘see’ the sights and ‘feel’ the trigger press and ‘experience’ follow through well before he or she actually physically carries them out.

Eventually, the mechanical elements will ‘slot’ into place without the shooter being consciously aware of it. The mechanics will come to the shooter through repetition and time. The professional golfer grasps his clubs in a very specific manner each and every time he handles them. The grip is the same and is aligned to the shaft in the same way each and every time. This consistency is the result of a lifetime of repeating the basics time and again. Once the mechanics are solidly in place, a shooter will find that the vast portion of his or her focus will not be on the mechanics but rather on problem solving. This mental computation will be processed at a faster and faster speed as you progress in your training. Eventually this will be computed at such a speed that it will only be evidenced ‘after the fact.’ It is only when you have time to compose yourself and reflect on the events that have transpired that you will recall all of the mechanics which you have employed. I have personally experienced this, particular phenomena in each and every one of my own shootings.

I have debriefed hundreds of officers who have performed well in shootings. I have pressed them on their recollection of the events. In each and every instance, they invariably recall that they were not specifically aware of the mechanics they applied at the time of the shooting yet they did in fact, apply them. This is why their shootings were successful. The awareness of their mental deliberation at the time of the shooting was recollected only after some introspective analysis of the incident.

Master these basic elements and everything else will be built upon strong, learned and practiced fundamentals. Strong fundamentals allow you to move forward. Some schools of thought will incorporate more aspects to the basics than these fundamentals. They might incorporate breathing, and which eye to use and so forth. In reality, the simple mechanical procedures outlined above are the basic principles and techniques which give you a very solid grounding. We need to simplify shooting rather than complicate it. No matter how complex the scenario, or how intricate the nature of the fight itself, the final moments will always call for application of the basics. This is something to think about!

From the first time you ever fire a shot until you have developed highly refined skills as regards the pistol, you should always strive for a fluid application of the shooting mechanics. This flow of the mechanics allows for all the physical and mental aspects of the mechanics to ‘flow’ into one another and work in concert with one another as well. Smooth, fluid and clean lines will always benefit you, the shooter.

# SECTION VI
# MANIPULATION OF THE PISTOL

"An improperly-sized or configured pistol will cause you to 'fight' your pistol rather than work with it."
—Scott Reitz

# THE CHAMBER CHECK

An essential component of safety and professionalism is the chamber check. This ensures the condition of the pistol at all times.

**1911-Type Pistols**

1. Hold the pistol in the firing hand at the low ready position with the muzzle in a safe direction and trigger finger placed alongside the frame above the trigger.

2. Use the support hand, thumb on top and the fingers wrapping beneath, to grasp the slide just behind (that's aft for Navy types) the muzzle or front sight.

3. Depress the thumb safety downward and use the support hand to retract the slide just enough to observe if there is a round in the chamber. Do not over—retract the slide, which can induce a malfunction or eject a live cartridge. All one needs to observe with semi-automatics, is a 'sliver' of the casing to ensure that a round is in fact, chambered. *[Note: Some individuals may lack the hand strength to accomplish this from a low ready position. If such is the case, then bring the firing hand back in so that the inside portion of the firing wrist contacts the rib cage. Place the firing support hand over the rear of the slide with the palm heel on one side of the slide and four finger tips placed on the opposing side of the slide. Retract the firing support hand in a rearward direction against the firmly locked pistol frame supported by the firing hand and visually inspect the chamber. This will now provide a firm base of resistance against the rearward retraction of the slide. This will work well for all other chamber checks described below as well.]*

4. Release the slide quickly to let it go forward under its own power, and then make sure it is fully closed and in battery.

**Double-Action Pistols with De-cocking Levers**

1. Hold the pistol in the firing hand at the low ready position with the muzzle in a safe direction and trigger finger placed alongside the frame above the trigger.

2. Place the index and middle finger of your support hand, on each de-cocking lever to either side (for right handed shooters the index finger on the right decocking lever and middle finger on the left decocking lever and for left handed shooters—simply the opposing configuration) and place the thumb of the support hand against the 'beavertail" (backward-projecting tang of the backstrap).

3. Press forward with the support hand thumb while pulling back with the two fingers on the de-cocking levers, retracting the slide just enough to observe if there is a round in the chamber. This is more of a compression of the two fingers against the resistance of the thumb. Do not over-retract the slide, which can induce a malfunction or eject a live cartridge.

4. Release the slide quickly to let it go forward under its own power, and then make sure it is fully closed and in battery.

**Alternate Method for Double-Action Pistols with De-cocking Levers**

1. Hold the pistol in the firing hand at the low ready position with the muzzle in a safe direction and trigger finger placed alongside the frame above the trigger.

2. Bring the pistol back until the wrist of the firing hand is held firmly against the chest.

3. Place the de-cocking levers downward and control the slide just in front of the decocking levers, compressing the slide with the palm heel on one side of the slide and the fingertips on the opposing side of the slide.

4. Retract the slide just enough to observe if there is a round in the chamber. Do not over-retract the slide, which can induce a malfunction or eject a live cartridge.

5. Release the slide quickly to let it go forward under its own power, and then make sure it is fully closed and in battery.

6. Return the decocking levers to an upward position allowing the pistol to fire. (Some double actions such as the Sig Sauer have automatic decocking lever returns which simplifies things.)

**Sig-Sauer P200 series and other pistols with hard-to-retract slides**

1. Hold the pistol in the firing hand with the muzzle in a safe direction and trigger finger placed alongside the frame above the trigger.

2. Cock the hammer with the firing support thumb

3. Retract the slide against the frame utilizing either the palm and four fingers of the support hand overlapped just in front of the rear sight or —use the firing support hand, thumb, and three fingers positioned just aft of the front sight, to retract the slide as is done with the Colt 1911 series pistol. Observe if there is a round in the chamber. Do not over-retract the slide, which can induce a malfunction or eject a live cartridge.

**Notes on the Chamber Check**

There are new models and sizes of pistols coming onto the market all the time. With the basic methods of chamber checks outlined previously, the shooter can modify the chamber check to suit the idiosyncrasies of any particular model. Just remember that it is absolutely imperative that the trigger finger is always kept alongside the frame and off of the trigger before, during, and after the chamber check!

Some pistols have chamber condition indicators, sometimes called ‘loaded chamber indicators’. These are usually small configured levers which protrude slightly outboard of the slide when a round is chambered or in some cases, half-rounded cutouts in the top of the slide just forward of the breech block. These have not proved to be overly reliable as they are hard to define and readily observe. It is better to visually observe the chamber’s condition by retracting the slide rather than rely solely upon a diminutive chamber indicator which may be misread. In low level light, when the slide is retracted, the trigger finger can simply reach in and ‘feel’ the casing if a visual check is not practical.

## LOADING THE PISTOL

1. Firmly grasp the pistol in the firing hand with the muzzle in a safe direction and trigger finger placed alongside the frame above the trigger. Conduct a chamber check.

2. Grasp a loaded magazine in the support hand, controlling it with the index finger, middle finger, and thumb. The tip of the index finger should be placed just below the bullet end of the uppermost round in the magazine. The front of the magazine base (or magazine pad) should be compressed against the heel of the palm.

3. With the upper portion of the magazine canted slightly forward, place the flat top rear of the magazine against the flat rear wall of the magazine well mouth, so that the upper portion of the magazine is slightly inside the magazine well.

4. Maintaining a slight pressure between the back of the magazine and the magazine well, rotate the magazine into the magazine well and thrust the magazine fully into the pistol using the heel of the palm to seat it firmly into the magazine well in one solid motion. In most instances, if this is done properly, there will be an audible ‘click’ as the magazine locks into place. Another way of viewing this is…flat to flat…rotate and seat.) Additionally,the shooter will feel the magazine lock into place. The magazine is now seated. Throughout this procedure the trigger finger is always positioned alongside the frame and off of the trigger.

5. With the firing hand held forward, pistol aimed in a safe direction and trigger finger off the trigger, bring the firing support hand over the top of the pistol and grasp the rear of the pistol’s slide behind the ejection port and partially over the rear sights. Your grip should be made with the palm heel of the support hand on one side of the slide and the four fingers tips on the other side. Some pistols have serrations at the rear of the slide to enhance your grip when performing this action.

6. Pushing the firing hand forward to secure the pistol in place, use one firm motion of the support hand to retract the slide to the rear until the frame of the pistol stops all rearward movement of the slide, and at that precise instant, release the slide while allowing the support hand to continue rearward until it strikes the shoulder of the firing arm.

7. Conduct a chamber check to ensure a round has been inserted in the chamber, and then make sure the slide is fully forward in battery.

8. Holster the pistol, remove the magazine and insert an additional round and then reinsert the fully uploaded magazine ensuring that it is fully locked into position.

**Notes on Loading the Pistol**

There are several excellent reasons for using the overhand technique to chamber a round into the chamber.

• It maximizes your support hand's gripping surface on the slide, which is especially important if the hands are slippery with sweat, water, blood, or if the hand strength is diminished from cold. The palm heel and four fingers provide a greater bearing surface exerting greater pressure on the slide. Should you miss articulating the slide properly in a gunfight the results could prove disastrous.

• The grip position is consistent with that used in malfunction clearances and speed reloads, when the slide is worked within a combat setting, and therefore no new technique need be learned—gripping the slide this way will be an automatic and learned process.

• Letting the support hand strike your shoulder ensures that this hand is far from the pistol muzzle during this abrupt mechanical action. From its safe position near the body it may then move quickly and safely forward in one clean line to achieve its supporting grip on the firing hand.

• If the support hand releases the slide when the frame stops all rearward motion and continues on to strike the shoulder, then the slide is completely free to travel forward under decompression spring pressure with no interference, thus seating the new round fully and positively into the chamber.

For these reasons, this technique is vastly superior to the 'slingshot' technique, in which the slide is gripped merely by the thumb and side of the index finger of the support hand. There is much less bearing surface exhibited on the slide with only two fingers as opposed to the palm heel and four fingers. Furthermore, in order to get the best hold with the "slingshot" technique, the pistol has to be turned onto its side. Returning it to the upright position after articulating the slide requires an extra motion. We are seeking clean lines not complicated ones. Once the slide is 'worked' you should always conduct a chamber check to ensure that a round has in fact, been chambered. When the chamber check is complete, ensure that the slide is fully locked forward into battery. Many shooters rely solely on auditory cues

to decide whether or not a round has been chambered. This is a fallible process. Absolute certainty concerning your pistol's condition is critical, therefore failure to conduct a chamber check simply doesn't make sense. If you are ever in doubt as to the condition of your pistol, conduct a chamber check. When you work with pistols long enough you will eventually conduct a chamber check and find, to your astonishment, that the condition of the pistol is not what you thought it to be.

It is imperative that you know the condition of your pistol at any given moment. This is distinctly different from thinking that you know. Many negligent discharges of pistols occur with supposedly 'unloaded' pistols. Often individuals who have experienced a negligent discharge will emphatically state that the pistol was never loaded, or that they were absolutely sure it was unloaded. Knowing the condition of your pistol at all times is not just part of being a professional, it is the responsible thing to do, and is a key element of gun safety. Last but not least, it may mean the difference between life and death in a critical situation.

# LOADING THE 1911



Chamber check. Visually inspect the chamber. Compress the fingers just aft of the front sight. Retract slide slightly.



Chamber check alternate. Firing wrist held firm to body. Firing support hand grasps rear of slide from an over the slide position and retracts slide slightly.



Magazine held in firing support hand. Base pad against palm heel. Index finger to front of magazine and just underneath uppermost round.



Guide magazine into magazine well. Flat to flat and rotate.



Magazine inserted into magazine well.



Seat magazine with one motion only.

# LOADING THE 1911 CONTINUED



Support hand over top of rear portion of slide.



Fingers firmly compress slide. This is positive and strong and vastly superior to “Sling Shot” technique.



Slide fully retracts to rear against the frame.



Support hand releases slide and strikes shoulder. This ensures the support hand never traverses in front of the muzzle.



Ensure that the pistol is in fact loaded with another chamber check!



Low level light physical chamber check with firing index finger. *Note!!! The trigger finger is always off the trigger and alongside the frame throughout the entire loading process.*

# LOADING THE GLOCK



Chamber check. Compress fingers against slide just aft of front sight. Retract slide slightly.



Alternate chamber check. Firing wrist held firmly to body. Support hand over top of rear portion of slide. Retract slightly to rear.



Magazine in support hand. Base pad against palm heel of hand. Support hand index finger positioned to front of magazine just underneath uppermost round.



Guide magazine into magazine well.



Insert magazine into magazine well.



Seat magazine with one motion only!

# LOADING THE GLOCK CONTINUED



Grasp rear of slide from above, using all four fingers and palm heel of support hand.



Retract slide fully to rear against the frame.



Release slide and strike shoulder. This ensures that the support hand does not traverse in front of muzzle.



Conduct secondary chamber check to ensure pistol is loaded and round is chambered.



Low level light physical chamber check with firing index finger.

*Note!!! The trigger finger is always off the trigger and alongside the frame throughout the entire loading process.*

# LOADING THE DOUBLE ACTION AUTO



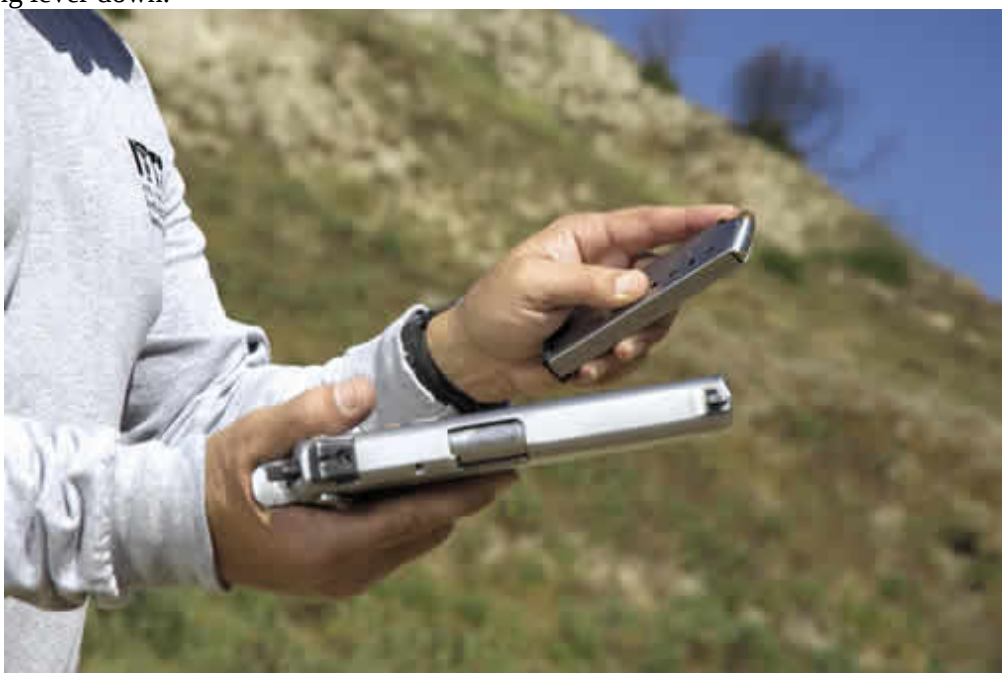
Place de-cocking levers down.



Firing support index and middle finger press against de-cocking lever. Support thumb presses against back of back strap.



Compress the two fingers against resistance provided by thumb. Conduct a chamber check keeping de-cocking lever down.



Hold magazine in support hand. Base pad is against palm heel. Support index finger to front of magazine just under uppermost round.



Guide magazine into magazine well. Flat to flat and rotate.



Seat with one positive motion with palm heel.

# LOADING THE DOUBLE ACTION AUTO CONTINUED



Support hand grasps rear of slide firmly from above, positioned in front of de-cocking levers.



Retract slide fully to rear against frame.



Release slide and strike shoulder. This ensures that the support hand does not traverse in front of the muzzle.



Conduct a chamber check to ensure a round is chambered.



Low level light physical chamber check with firing index finger.

*Note!!! The trigger finger is always off the trigger and alongside the frame throughout the entire loading process.*

# LOADING THE REVOLVER



Press against cylinder release with firing thumb. Middle and third finger of support hand press against cylinder.



Open cylinder.



Use either a speed loader or individually place rounds into chambers.



Index two outboard rounds in speed loader with two outboard empty chambers of cylinder.

# LOADING THE REVOLVER CONTINUED



Rotate remaining rounds into empty chambers.



Press speed loader straight into cylinder. Keep muzzle vertical in a downward position.



Run thumb across all seated rounds to check for high primers or unseated rounds.



Close cylinder. Ease hammer to half cock position and fully rotate cylinder to ensure it does not bind.
*Note!!! The trigger finger is always off the trigger and alongside the frame throughout the entire loading process.*

## UNLOADING THE PISTOL

**Right-handed shooters:**

1. Conduct a chamber check. Remove magazine.
2. Hold the pistol in the right hand with the muzzle in a safe direction and the trigger finger placed alongside the frame above the trigger.
3. Keeping the muzzle pointed in the same safe direction, rotate your wrist 90 degrees outward, turning the pistol onto its side, ejection port facing the ground.
4. Keeping the pistol in the same position in space, rotate the left side of your body until the pistol is in front of you and you are facing 90 degrees from the direction the pistol is oriented.
5. Place your left hand over the top of the slide and grip it with the palm heel on one side of the slide and the fingertips on the other side, forming an arch directly over the ejection port.
6. Being careful not to let any fingers enter the trigger guard, re-orient the right hand so that the thumb places constant upward pressure on the slide lock lever while the support hand retains a firm grip on the pistol slide.
7. In one firm, smooth motion, retract the slide until the slide locks back and the round in the chamber falls into the left hand.

**Left-handed shooters:**

(*Note that some left-handed shooters prefer to use the technique described above.)*

1. Conduct a chamber check. Remove magazine.
2. Hold the pistol in the left hand with the muzzle in a safe direction and the trigger finger placed alongside the frame above the trigger.
3. Keeping the muzzle pointed in the same safe direction, rotate your wrist 90 degrees inward, turning the pistol onto its side, ejection port facing the ground.
4. Using your right hand, palm up, grasp the slide with thumb on the left side of the slide and the four fingers on the right side. The palm side of the hand will form a cup beneath the ejection port.
5. Place constant upward pressure on the slide lock lever with the left index or trigger finger.

6. In one firm, smooth motion, retract the slide with the right hand until the slide locks back and the round in the chamber falls into the right hand.

**Notes on Unloading the Pistol**

Thousands of negligent discharges have occurred as the result of improper unloading procedures. I have been asked on numerous occasions throughout my career to defend officers on hearings wherein a negligent discharge had occurred as the result of an officer's actions. The conversation often went something along these lines:

Them: "Can you defend Officer X whose pistol accidentally went off when he was cleaning it at home which resulted in the demise of the neighbor's cat, Fluffy?"

Me: "Well, the gun was obviously loaded…"

Them: "No it wasn't."

Me: "Then how did it discharge?"

Them: "We don't know but we're pretty sure it wasn't loaded."

Me: "I can't help you there."

Them: "Why?"

Me: "Because it was loaded."

Them: "No, we're pretty sure it wasn't."

Me: "Then how did it go off?"

Them: "We don't know."

Me: "I'm sorry, I can't help you."

Them: "Why?"

If you've been in this business long enough you're going to hear about the proverbial unloaded gun that mysteriously fired. But this has never happened, isn't happening now as you read these pages, and will never happen in the future. It can't. Either it's loaded or it's unloaded.

A number of students throughout the years have asked me, "Why would I conduct a chamber check if I know that I am going to unload the pistol anyway?" This is done for two important reasons.

• Consistency. It forms good safety habits. You are forming mind and 'muscle memory' patterns that are safe and reliable and will translate into other firearm manipulation procedures.

• Switching on. When you conduct a chamber check prior to unloading, it tells you to pay attention, or as I have said for decades to

‘switch on’ and pay attention. You are being reminded visually that the pistol is in a ‘hot’ or loaded condition. Remember that ‘complacency kills.’ This is true with firearms as it would be with a multi-million dollar fighter plane where one seemingly insignificant oversight can easily bring everything down around you. There can be nothing cavalier about this process. You must pay attention to the details.

Sometimes the question arises as to whether or not the round in the chamber could detonate when this unloading procedure is followed. First, there is no likely mechanical reason why a round should detonate when using this procedure. Second, I am aware of no documented case in which a cartridge detonated when using this procedure correctly. The slide is retracted smoothly and not at speed. Done properly this technique will work flawlessly throughout your shooting career. Learn the technique and then practice it and you will not suffer a mishap. Again, in over thirty-four years I have never witnessed an open breech detonation using this procedure nor am I aware of any documented case where this happened.

Within certain shooting communities and government institutions, the final step in the unloading process is pressing the trigger. I do not necessarily agree with this. If the shooter has missed something or has become distracted while unloading and a cartridge remains in the chamber, the pistol will discharge. This has occurred many, many times. There is nothing to be gained by performing a final trigger press, other than possibly firing a round a round when you didn’t intend to. If you wish to store a weapon for an extended period of time and do not want the hammer or firing pin to remain cocked, then the unloading process needs to repeated, and redundant chamber checks need to be conducted prior to either pressing the trigger or easing the hammer forward.

For some groups, the unloading protocol includes ejecting any live round remaining in the chamber by articulating the slide or bolt back and forth several times. This is especially prevalent in military communities where, for example, large numbers of personnel return simultaneously from the field and perform this final unloading action immediately prior to entering a base camp. Herein lies the problem; if the extractor is broken, worn or the rim of the chambered case is torn then multiple workings of the slide will still fail to extract the live cartridge. The simple fact is that by ejecting a live round in a controlled manner from the chamber into the

shooter’s hand, irrespective of the weapon employed, it definitively illustrates that this particular live round was from that particular weapon’s chamber. Thus there is no doubt as to whether that weapon’s chamber is loaded or unloaded.

# UNLOADING THE 1911



Chamber check pistol prior to unloading. This ensures you pay attention and “switch-on.”



Finger off trigger. Muzzle in safe direction. Remove magazine.



Place magazine between small and third finger of support hand. This ensures that this magazine is extracted from this pistol.



Turn body into pistol. Muzzle maintains same orientation in safe direction. Turn pistol onto right side.



Firing support hand comes over top of slide and ejection port.

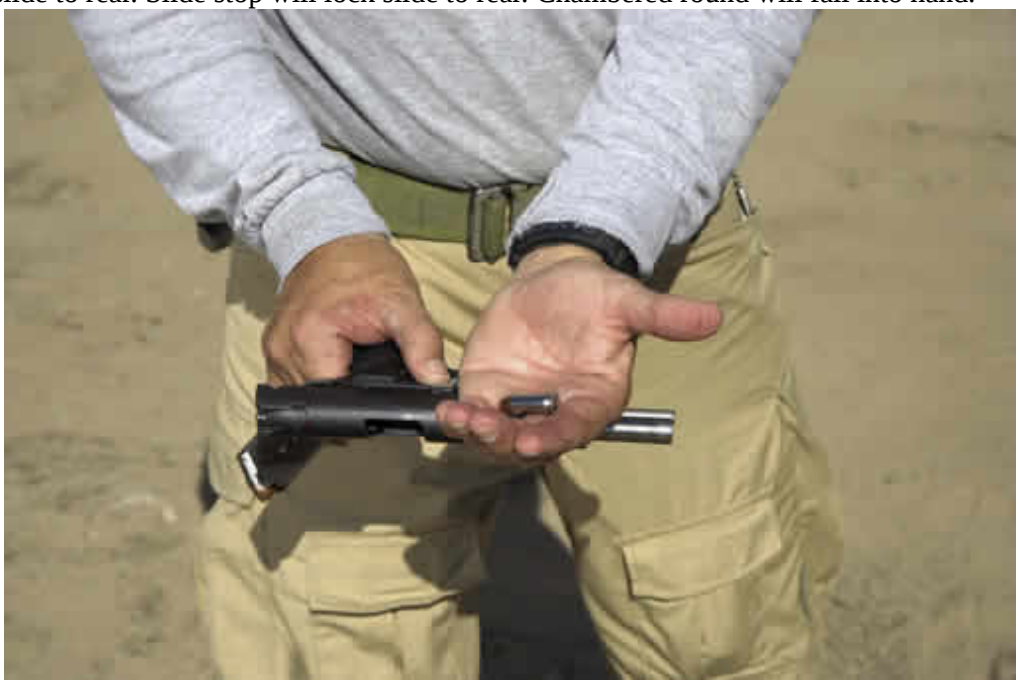


Push up on slide stop continuously.

# UNLOADING THE 1911 CONTINUED



Retract slide to rear. Slide stop will lock slide to rear. Chambered round will fall into hand.



Chambered round will fall into hand. You have now ensured that both the magazine and round were from that pistol.



Return to low ready.



Ease the slide forward.



Chamber check once again to ensure condition of the pistol.

# UNLOADING DOUBLE ACTION AUTO

All unloading procedures outlined previously are applicable to the double action auto with one exception. Place de-cocking lever down throughout entire procedure.



Place de-cocking lever down.



Conduct chamber check.



With magazine extracted lock slide to rear. Capture live round.

# UNLOADING THE REVOLVER



Press on cylinder release.



Press open cylinder with middle and third finger of support hand.



Release firing grip. Place firing thumb on top of hammer. This will allow cartidges/casings to fall freely without interference.



Preferred: Place muzzle straight upright into the vertical. Press down on ejector rod with palm heel of support hand. Rounds/casings will fall to the deck.



Alternate: Press open cylinder with middle and third finger of support hand.

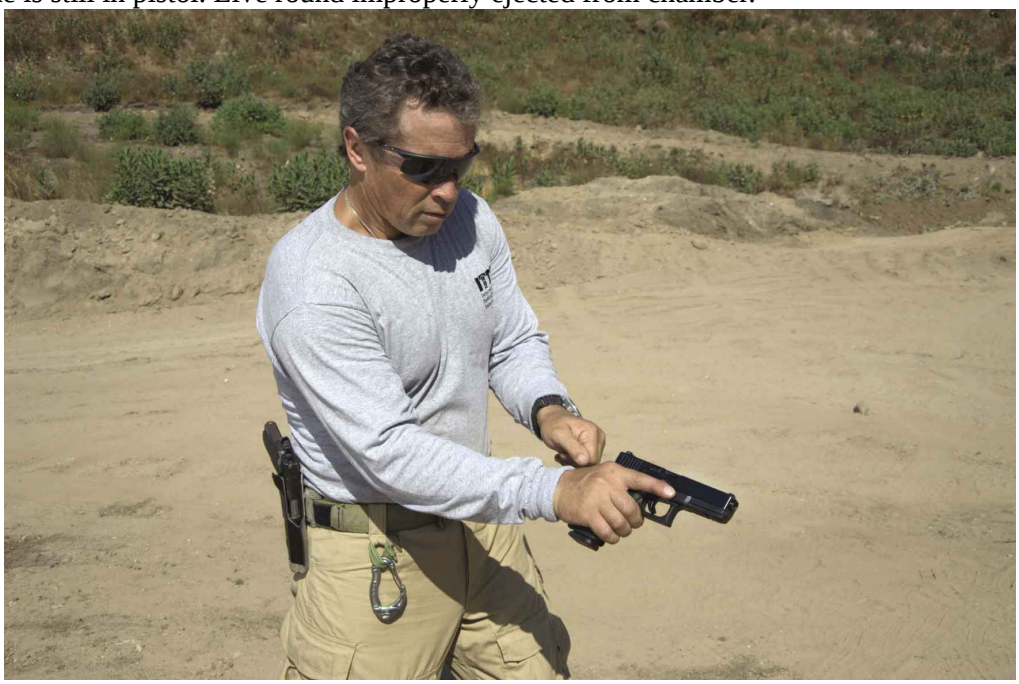


Release firing grip and press on ejector rod with support thumb. With muzzle in the vertical, rounds will fall either into the hand or onto the deck

# HOW NOT TO UNLOAD



Magazine is still in pistol. Live round improperly ejected from chamber.



Slide released - possible round re-chambered.



Support hand towards front of pistol.



Slide forward, finger on trigger, muzzle covering support hand. Disaster!

## THE RELOAD

At some point either with the semi-automatic or the revolver, the pistol will need to be reloaded. In other words, the shooter will have either depleted all the rounds in the magazine and the chamber of the semi-automatic or the cylinders of the revolver. In order to place the pistol or revolver back into a firing, operational status it will have to be reloaded. With a properly functioning semi-automatic, the slide will lock to the rear when the final chambered round is expended. With the revolver, the shooter will simply experience the hammer falling on an expended casing within the cylinder.

When the slide locks to the rear with the semi-automatic pistol the following steps should be taken. First and foremost, the trigger finger MUST come off of the trigger during the entire reloading procedure. (This will ensure that upon completion of the reload, the trigger is not actuated when the slide returns into full battery which might then result in a negligent discharge of the pistol.) Utilize the firing thumb to press firmly in on the magazine release. Ideally, the tip of the firing thumb should be utilized for this manipulation. This ‘tip’ portion of the firing thumb will provide a firm resistance against the magazine release as opposed to the fleshy, less resistant portion of the pad of the firing thumb. Maintain the pistol in as upright and vertical a position as is possible as this will allow gravity to assist in clearing the magazine from the magazine well. Ensure that the inward pressure exerted against the magazine release is both firm and constantly maintained (I term this ‘holding hard’) until the expended magazine falls clear of the pistol. (Laying the pistol on its side when releasing the magazine, may result in the magazine remaining in the magazine well and only being partially discharged from the pistol itself. Gravity will not be utilized to its greatest effect if the pistol is in a configuration other than the straight, upright, vertical attitude. Additionally, if the shooter simply ‘pulses’ on the magazine release with nominal pressure and without full depression, then it may re-engage the magazine resulting in the expended magazine only partially clearing the magazine well.)

For individuals with smaller hands the pistol itself may have to be ‘skewed’ or ‘canted’ within the firing hand to attain a position where the tip of the firing thumb can press directly into the magazine release. In other words, the pistol will have to rotate slightly within the firing hand. For right

handed shooters, the pistol will rotate towards the left side of the shooter. For left handed shooters, the tip of the trigger finger and not the firing thumb will be utilized to actuate the magazine release. For the left handed shooter, the pistol will rotate slightly within the firing hand towards the shooters right side. (Note that most pistols have the magazine release positioned on the left side of the pistol. Some models of pistols do however have either ambidextrous magazine releases or, the ability to change the magazine release from one side to the other. If this is the case then the left thumb of the firing hand would be utilized just as it is for the right handed shooter.)

As the empty magazine clears the magazine well, reach for a spare, fully loaded magazine with the firing support hand. Grasp the new magazine in the same manner as you would when loading the pistol initially. The firing support index finger should be positioned to the front, rounded portion of the magazine just underneath the uppermost round in the magazine. The base of the spare magazine should be positioned against the firm portion of the palm heel of the firing support hand with the thumb and middle fingers positioned to either side of the magazine's sides. This provides a firm, overall control of the spare magazine. (Note that this is exactly how one would position the magazine in the firing support hand when loading initially.)

Place the flat portion of the spare magazine against the flat, inner portion of the magazine well. Rotate the spare magazine slightly towards the front of the pistol as you press the magazine into the magazine well. This motion will 'guide' the magazine fully into the magazine well. Seat and lock the spare magazine into the pistol with one, single firm motion utilizing the firm portion of the palm heel to provide firm resistance so that the magazine 'locks' into position in the pistol. This firm locking procedure will oftentimes be accompanied by an audible 'click' and a physical 'feel' that the spare magazine is in fact, firmly seated and locked into the pistol.

The shooter now has two options on releasing the slide into full, operational battery. On some models of pistols such as the Colt Model 1911, the support thumb can simply press down on the slide release which allows the slide to return to full battery while simultaneously chambering the uppermost round from the spare magazine. I favor this system over all others as I am simultaneously rendered a solid, two handed firing grip with no further adjustment necessitated. Another benefit is that unless the magazine is fully seated, I personally, cannot access the slide release. This also

disallows the slide from ever going forward when the magazine is not fully seated which would then result in an empty chamber. A number of other models of pistols will also allow for this manipulation as well. If the magazine release cannot be accessed in this manner then the support hand may simply come across and over the rear portion of the slide as is performed when chambering the first round. Simply retract the slide to its rearmost position on the frame until it is stopped by the frame itself and then release the slide allowing the firing support hand to continue towards the firing shoulder and then rotate down and forward into a two handed grip. This will allow the slide to positively return forward into full battery utilizing the decompression force of the recoil spring. (This is precisely what occurs when a round is discharged and the slide retracts fully to the rear and then forward due to spring decompression. In a firing sequence, this is accomplished automatically between discharges.)

Do not ‘ride’ or assist the slide forward when releasing it. More often than not, this dampens and neutralizes the force of the decompressing recoil spring resulting in the slide not locking into full battery which may disallow it from firing. An attendant safety concern is that the firing support hand may traverse in front of the muzzle which then violates safety protocol.

In some instances, the physical force of seating a magazine into the magazine well may in fact, cause the slide to go forward on its own with no further input from the shooter. If this is the case then you are quite simply - ready to fire once again and no further action is required on your behalf. This may occur on a more frequent basis with well-worn and heavily used pistols as opposed to newer ones.

With the revolver, once it has been determined that it needs to be reloaded, press either forward or retract to the rear, the cylinder release. (Some revolver models will require a forward press on the cylinder release whereas others will require a rearward retraction.) Press against the middle of the empty cylinder with the middle and third finger of the firing support hand pressing in the direction in which the cylinder opens. Re-position the firing thumb to the top of the hammer from alongside the stocks. Rotate the muzzle into the straight, upright, vertical position. With cylinder now open and free from the frame, the ejector rod will be clear of the revolver frame as well. Using the firing support hand, position it directly over the uppermost end of the ‘cleared’ ejector rod. Strike down on the ejector rod using the

interior portion of the web of the firing support hand to press hard against the ejector rod. The expended casings will fall free in unison and the firing thumb (now positioned on top of the hammer) will not impeded their vertical release.

Rotate the muzzle straight down into the vertical and reposition a spare, fully loaded, round speed reloader into the cylinder and actuate the reloader release mechanism and the rounds will fall into the empty chambers in unison. Some revolver reloaders will require a turn of a knurled knob to release the rounds and the cylinder must be held to avoid turning and disallowing the release of the rounds. Other round, revolver speed reloaders will only require a firm downward press against the ejector star to release the rounds. My preference is for the latter as it is faster and I do not have to control any movement of the cylinder.

Most left handed shooters will simply opt to reload the revolver in the manner which a right handed shooter would. This would require a release of the revolver from a firing grip whereas the right handed shooter does not. Some left handed shooters have devised some rather fancy manipulations which retain the revolver in a firing grip but they are generally harder to master. The cylinder release is actuated with the left trigger finger. The palm heel of the right hand strikes the cylinder open and the muzzle rotates into the upright vertical as the revolver itself turns into the shooters right shoulder. The inner portion of the web of the right hand thrusts down on the ejector and the pistol turns deeper into the shooter's right side as the muzzle now orients and returns to a vertical downward position. The speed reloader in the right hand orients the rounds into the cylinder and releases the rounds and the cylinder is closed from atop the revolver with the right hand and the pistol turns back once again towards the threat/target.

These reloads should be practiced slowly and broken down into sequential steps so that each step is clean. You are just learning the pistol/revolver so be patient and take your time. Attempting to speed the process up might not be to your benefit at this juncture.

*NOTE: In, The Art of Modern Gunfighting Vol. II, we will discuss and explain in greater detail the; 'out of battery speed reload', the 'in battery speed reload' and the 'tactical reload' with accompanying photographs for each. There is a lot more information and philosophy regarding these techniques than you might think.*

# THE DRAW OR PRESENTATION

## Preliminary Notes on Drawing the Pistol

The pistol draw, sometimes termed the presentation, includes (1) removing the pistol from the holster and (2) positioning the pistol at a point in space. That final position is always dependent upon what you are presented with. If a field situation dictated that the pistol, be drawn in anticipation of applying deadly force yet has not quite reached that stage then one might draw to the 'low ready' position. (There are many variations on this.) If on the other hand, the threat was immediate then the pistol would be drawn directly onto the threat.

When I was a rookie officer in Wilshire Division in 1977 it was a 'hot' division full of 'hot shot' calls. It seemed that every watch had shootings, robberies, stabbings, pursuits, etc. I was assigned to one training officer who emphatically stated in no uncertain terms, "If you don't already have a pistol out in your hands when the fight starts, you have essentially screwed up." He continued to explain, "Therefore, you don't need to mess with practicing old western-style fast draw techniques."

That sort of stuff was apparently for sissies and incompetent street cops. In that day and age you obeyed your training officer. There was no recourse available if you ever got on his bad side. He was absolutely and unequivocally dead wrong on this matter.

The problem with this unsound philosophy can easily be explained. Would it be better to have the pistol out and already in hand prior to a lethal confrontation? Absolutely it would. So what's wrong with this picture? You as a human being cannot with 100% accuracy predict what will transpire in the next few seconds or minutes or hours. What might seem to be a benign situation at the outset can turn deadly serious in the blink of an, eye. In other words, there is no way to know in advance, each and every time, when a pistol needs to be drawn and ready for action prior to an event.

Thirty years with the LAPD taught me one thing. Never assume. Police work is an extemporaneous affair; things just happen. Situations can develop out of nowhere, and when the dust settles you may find yourself wondering; Where, did that come from? This has happened to me more than I care to remember. The performance of police duties almost always requires a response to what others have initiated. We are reactive by the very nature of our job. Civilian and military personnel also must react to situations. A

rapid, proper pistol draw provides you with an effective response to the unexpected. Failure to comprehend and integrate its true significance has meant the ultimate sacrifice for many.

Back to my training officer. If I had my pistol out and in hand every time I stopped an individual or experienced a slight ‘discomfort’ factor in no time at all I’d be wrapped in an ‘I love me jacket’ in a padded room. I’d also be out of a career. It simply is neither feasible nor legal in some instances to have the pistol out and ready all the time.

Enter the significance of the draw (or ‘presentation’). Put simply, the draw of the pistol is essential to your survival.

When I went through the LAPD Academy, we were never given formal instruction on just what method we should employ to draw our trusty 4-inch .38’s. We had forty- one recruits in my class. We had forty-one different ways of drawing the pistol as well. Some of us managed to introduce personal flare to the official Dragnet-style draw and we thought that was pretty cool. Others never really got a handle on it.

The holsters that we were issued back then were ‘break-front’ holsters, which were absolutely terrible for developing any kind of speed. Re-holstering was even worse. You had to position the bottom of the trigger guard on the top of, and to the front of, the spring-loaded lips which formed the front of the holster. It took considerable pressure to press down on the lips and open them up, and then it required a very forceful and rearward second rotational effort to seat the pistol. If your uniform trousers were not properly secured, they were down around your ankles in a New York minute. That was just great! Not one of us dared to broach the subject of a proper, codified draw from this holster, and we never received any formalized instruction on doing it with speed and efficiency. Upon reflection, I don’t suppose that there ever was an efficient method. The Academy’s underpinning philosophy at that time was that if you couldn’t figure out how to draw the pistol from the holster then you probably didn’t belong there in the first place. (There just might be a degree of validity to this philosophy.)

The absence of any structured presentation of the pistol was a rather dangerous affair. The pistol was not merely ornamentation - it was a working tool that we depended on. If you couldn’t remove the tool then you couldn’t use it. This concept was utterly logical and yet it was dismissed by many as non-essential. Many officers throughout the decades have paid the ultimate

price when they could not get their pistols into action from the holsters. I cannot envision anything more frustrating or terrifying than the inability to draw the pistol rapidly and smoothly when a bad guy is bearing down on you. The draw is not play-shooting. The draw is not a cheap knock-off of the weathered gunfighter squinting into the setting sun across the dusty, tumbleweed-strewn street. It is an extremely essential and critical component of gunfighting.

To simplify instructions, I will describe the draw from a basic side (or hip) holster. All other draws will be fairly simple modifications of this draw. If the holster has retention devices or a different placement on the body then you simply adapt accordingly.

I have divided the draw from initiation to the firing of the pistol which entails five counts, or steps; each count should be understood, learned, and practiced. The draw may also be performed in just three steps such as drawing to the low ready position or directly onto target. Always seek the cleanest and purest lines possible in each and every physical motion carried out during the draw irrespective of how many counts you employ. Clean, short lines are always more efficient. Once each count is practiced they will all flow together in a seamless draw that is fast, smooth, and reliable, even under stress.

You should periodically go through the entire draw step by step to ensure that no bad habits or techniques have crept up on you. I myself will run through the entire draw and re-holstering procedure at a very slow and methodical pace from time to time to check for flaws. Once the physical action of the draw and re-holstering has been established and honed, speed will naturally follow. Remember, a clean draw—no bumps, glitches, or hesitations—may not appear to be fast to the uninitiated observer, but it is. Smooth lines equate into speed and efficiency. A relatively simple and yet effective method of practice is to conduct the counts in front of a full length mirror with an unloaded firearm. Ensure that you double and triple redundancy checked your pistol’s condition. Look closely for any extraneous motion or hesitant actions that do not need to be there. I strongly advise removing all loaded magazines and live ammunition from the room when you do this. It is easy to make a mistake and inadvertently load the gun by accident, or inadvertently practice with a live firearm. Don’t make this mistake! Keep the ammunition in another room.

Another point—when your draw is smooth and fast, you leave no doubt in an aggressor's mind as to what you're capable of doing, and a well-executed draw has stopped many situations from escalating to the level of deadly force. Through the decades my partners and I have made use of this technique hundreds of times on the streets of Los Angeles. I always made a point of asking a suspect who had been armed and that we had subsequently arrested with our guns decisively drawn why he didn't try to shoot it out with us. The response was universal and could be summed up, "Are you kidding? The way you guys look, I knew you would have shot me right then and there."

This 'look' as suspects so eloquently put it was nothing more than comporting ourselves professionally, decisively, and with technical proficiency, which left little doubt in the suspect's mind as to our resolve and ability to stop anything he elected to start.

**The Presentation of the Pistol (the Draw)**

The following instructions describe a draw that ends with your pistol aligned with your intended target. It can be easily modified to a draw to low ready or directly onto target.

**COUNT 1**—Simultaneously, (a) the firing hand releases any holster retention devices while obtaining a solid firing grip on the pistol and (b) the support hand presses firmly against the abdomen in the belt area, fingers together and thumb extended upward towards the base of the chin.

The firing hand must secure a firm firing grip on the pistol before it is drawn from the holster. This is an essential point. As noted, gunfights typically start and end very quickly. There may be little or no time to re-adjust your grip in the midst of a life-and-death situation. Most probably, the initial firing grip is what you will subsequently fight with, so get it right from the beginning.

If the holster incorporates a pistol retention device—a strap, lever, rotating hood, etcetera—then that device should be activated simultaneous with obtaining the firing grip. At the same time the firing hand is obtaining a proper firing grip on the pistol, the firing support hand is placed forcefully in the belt buckle area of the abdomen with the fingers pressed together and held parallel to the belt line. The support hand thumb is pointed vertically, toward your chin. This pre-positions the support hand to receive and support the firing hand. Many shooters improperly move one hand first and then the

other, resulting in one hand ‘chasing’ the other as the draw stroke is completed. Avoid this problem by moving both hands at the same time.

Note that this movement—Count 1 of the draw—should be performed extremely aggressively. It is what I term a jerk or fast twitch response. It is the most important of the five draw counts. Why should Count 1 be so aggressive? First, many threats are immediate and you must respond to them as fast as possible. Second, without this step nothing else can possibly follow, and the slower it is done, the longer it will be before the follow-on steps are performed. By necessity you must start out practicing slowly to perfect this step of the draw, and then subsequently increase the speed. But once you have perfected the step, do not continue to practice it in a slow, stylized methodical pace on the range. You fight as you train. Many officers have attempted to aggressively speed up their draw under the very real threat of a deadly force encounter, but having never practiced at such speed in training they ended up fumbling with their firearm and losing critical seconds. A slow, stylized draw has no place on the streets or in the real world.

I clearly remember qualifying on the LAPD combat courses throughout the years and observing many officers releasing the retention device well before a firing sequence which incorporated the draw. In essence, they were practicing one method on the range when the streets afforded no such latitude. It would be impractical to perform this retention release on each and every stop, investigation, etcetera, during the course of your duties. Officers have lost their lives fighting a retention strap which they had never practiced releasing during the draw.

Another problem I noticed was that officers matched their draw speed with their pre-planned firing pace. That is, when shooting at farther targets, which required a slower shooting pace, they would draw slowly to begin the firing sequence. Similarly, when they practiced head shots—a more precise and demanding shot—they would draw slowly. This accomplishes precisely the opposite of the intended goal. Because of the time lost by the slow draw, they actually had less time to press off accurately fired shots and subsequently they rushed them with poor results. The draw should always be as fast as one can manage it irrespective of the distance or complexity of the problem with which one is presented.

A poorly executed Count 1 of the draw will always place you behind the power curve in a gunfight. Count 1 should be practiced again and again and again. Bear in mind that Count 1 is crucial, as everything else follows from it. Work at it until your firing grip is sound from the very beginning and there is no extraneous motion. Ensure that both hands work smoothly and in concert with one another.

**COUNT 2**—In one continuous motion, draw the pistol straight up until it completely clears the holster and -- keeping it above the holster -- rotate the pistol until the muzzle points forward, all the while keeping the trigger finger alongside the frame off of the trigger and the support hand pressed against the abdomen.

**COUNT 3**—In one continuous motion (a) thrust the pistol forward toward the target or threat, and (b) about a foot or so outboard from your body, during the forward thrust, join the support hand with the firing hand in a proper two-hand firing grip and continue to extend your arms until the final firing stance or low ready position is complete.

Ensure that the muzzle of the pistol does not cover the support hand when they join. The support hand should always trail the muzzle and is NEVER to the front of the muzzle as it joins the firing hand. Again, when Count 3 is completed, the firing arm should be fully extended and locked into position and the support arm should be slightly bent at the elbow, support hand pulling back on the firing hand with isometric tension exerted between the arms (firing arm pushing forward—firing support arm pulling back). If you are drawing to low ready, at full extension the firing arm will be angled downward so that the pistol is oriented towards the ground a few feet in front of you. There are many variations of the low ready position but for now, this is the optimum position to use.

**COUNT 4**—The pistol now is brought up from the low ready position in a straight, vertical line as the finger comes off from the frame onto the trigger and the sights are aligned onto the target. The shooter’s visual focus is transferred from the threat/target to the sights. This visual focus and refinement of sight alignment will always vary due to the complexity of the problem with which the shooter is presented. These two physical actions (trigger finger placement on the trigger and shifting of visual focus to the sights) will be conducted simultaneously. Ideally, the

slack on the trigger is fully taken out when the sights are aligned on the target.

**COUNT 5**—The shot(s) are now fired completing the draw stroke and firing of the pistol. The speed with which the entire process is completed will always be dependent on the problem presented to the shooter.

*NOTE: Traditionally; the draw has always been presented as a five count process including the firing of the pistol. In the vast majority of cases however this is not the case in the field. It will most likely be a three count process simply drawing the pistol to the low ready position. It is from here that the potential threat is either countered or directives are complied with by the confronted suspect. For the hundreds and hundreds of times that officers draw their pistol in field encounters very, very few shots are ever fired.*

You should place equal emphasis on drawing to both of these positions (low ready position only and directly onto the target or threat both from the holster and an already assumed low ready position.) I have personally experienced the drawing without firing hundreds and hundreds of times over a three-decade career. If my partner and I braced suspects in the street, especially gang members, drug dealers, and other violence-prone individuals, then one or both of us would invariably draw forcefully to the low ready stance when a suspect made movements that were not consistent with our directives. Quite a number of guns, knives, and weapons were recovered from these suspects that they could have used had we not drawn and covered them. They knew without a doubt from our physical actions that we 'had' them, so to speak, so the simple act of drawing to the low ready stance in a forceful and professional manner averted a potential deadly force encounter. The forcefulness of your verbal directives also has a strong deterrent effect.

*NOTE: If you only practice the draw to the target/threat and disregard the draw to the low ready position, you are courting disaster. There have been documented cases of individuals drawing directly onto a suspect and unintentionally completing a firing sequence. This is all they had ever practiced, all they were ever taught and under stress they unconsciously reverted to it. Very few instructors are court-qualified deadly force experts and fewer still have ever testified or worked on such court cases. Be forewarned: while some 'armchair experts' may justify techniques*

*such as always drawing directly onto a potential suspect, they would be very hard-pressed to justify this should an unnecessary shooting occur as a result of such improper training.*

In Metropolitan Division, we worked high-risk crime suppression in the divisions that were always out of control. This was our primary mission. We provided immediate response to any hot-shot calls thrown out on any particular watch in the divisions to which we were assigned. We did not issue tickets nor take crime reports. Ours was strictly a felony suppression role; we primarily looked for dope, guns, gang members, shooters etc. It was not at all unusual for partners in Metro (we always ran 'two deep') to conduct fifteen to twenty stops—or more—in a single watch in pursuit of felony arrests. If you do the math, throughout the years any one of us could have easily incurred an 'out of policy shooting' had we not trained to use utilize the two distinctly different draw techniques explained above.

**Notes on the Low Ready Position**

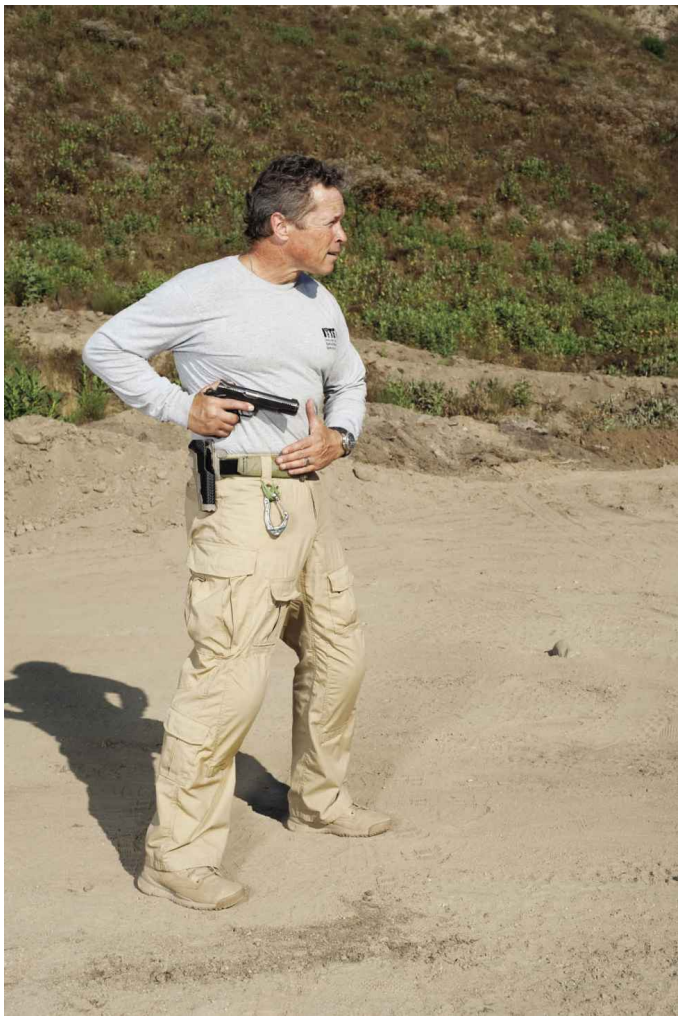
The low ready position provides one simple vertical line of upward travel to bring the pistol to bear on the target. Even if shots have been fired the low ready position when covering a potential threat, allows for the shortest and cleanest line of traverse back onto target should a threat reemerge. If the threat is so close in proximity (perhaps within ten feet) then a position other than the low ready such as weapon retention (wherein the pistol is brought into the strong side close to the body as in position two of the draw) would be advised. For any other situation however, the low ready (and there are a number of modifications of this) is still the more effective position.

# FIVE COUNT PRESENTATION



COUNT 1

Firing hand to pistol. Support hand to center at belt level.



COUNT 2
Pistol free from holster.



COUNT 3

Hands join. Arms begin to push forward to lock-out.



COUNT 4
Arms locked out.



COUNT 5
First shot breaks.

.

## RE-HOLSTERING

### Re-holstering in Four Counts

Remember that for the majority of cases, the pistol does not move toward the holster until the situation is completely in hand. This is practical and what one should do in actual fighting conditions.

**COUNT 1**—With the pistol at low ready, place your trigger finger along the frame above the trigger and reset any safeties or de-cocking levers. Some schools of thought propose not actuating safeties de-cockers until the pistol is just above the holster. The rationale given is that the opponent or opponents may not be completely out of the fight, or that they may charge the shooter. But if this were a possibility, why would I ever contemplate re-holstering? This is an illogical rational. Keeping your pistol out at the low ready until you are absolutely sure there is no further danger is just common sense, sound tactics, and safety all rolled into one. Any safeties should be re-set before a single millimeter of rearward travel is conducted. Failure to adhere to this procedure can result in the pistol being reholstered with the hammer or firing pin cocked, no safety reset and the trigger inadvertently being either pressed or catching on a portion of the holster resulting in a negligent discharge.

**COUNT 2**—Bring the pistol into position just above the holster and pause there for about a one thousand one count. (This position would be a mirror image of count two when drawing the pistol from the holster.)

During this momentary pause, mentally check: are the safeties or de-cockers reset? Is the finger off the trigger and alongside the frame? This short checklist will ensure your safety.

**COUNT 3**—Insert the pistol into the holster rotating the muzzle straight down while still maintaining a firm grip on the pistol itself. The trigger finger is alongside the frame slightly outboard of the holster itself as the pistol is seated.

**COUNT 4**—Reset any retention devices. Since there are so many retention devices and new ones constantly emerging this would be a simple matter of resetting the retention device whatever it might be. Nothing is more embarrassing or dangerous than having a pistol drop free from the holster simply due to inattention to this seemingly obvious action.

### Notes on Re-holstering

If you are a police officer you will re-holster your sidearm in the field many, many times during your career, often in order to control a suspect. If re-holstering is not done properly, shooting yourself, your partner, or someone else is possible. During range training shooters often develop a very dangerous habit which we call the ‘speed re-holster.’ The shooter will finish a string of fire and after a brief pause will suddenly return the pistol to the holster with astonishing quickness, sometimes re-holstering faster than he drew!

Re-holstering at ‘warp’ speed is caused primarily by drawing and re-holstering so many times in a comparatively short period of time; humans repeating the same physical action hundreds of times will tend to fall into a ‘groove.’ But if speed re-holstering continues, it will become a trained-in habit—a bad one, for several reasons.

• Reason one — to my knowledge, no one has ever won a gunfight by speed re-holstering. Hundreds of people, however, have shot themselves performing the ‘speed re-holster’ in training and in the field. A police officer doing this has just accomplished to himself what the bad guys were attempting to do all along. In real life it is seldom necessary for an officer to re-holster quickly, since this is normally done when a situation is well under control.

• Reason two — in real-world situations, if shots have been fired or a suspect is down, the shooter will then probably either cover the suspect or the immediate crime scene for quite some time while it is contained. This has always been the case in my shootings as well as in other shootings which I have witnessed. It would make little or no sense to instantly speed re-holster when the situation is not absolutely under control, with no further action required by the shooter. I have personally been at the low ready for quite some time before we contained the crime scene.

• Reason three — Actual shootings send adrenaline and steroids coursing through the shooter’s body. He may experience tremors, rapid breathing, and the heightening of some senses and degradation of others, including fine motor skills. These are normal physiological and psychological responses to a highly stressful situation but the shooter may be unaware of some or all of these phenomena. Any of these responses in concert with a ‘speed re-holster’ set a shooter up for a mishap. Slowly and effectively re-holster and you will simply avoid this!

# SECTION VII
# COMBAT MINDSET

“A mechanically-skilled shooter who possesses a ‘switched on’ combat mindset is very hard to beat”
— Scott Reitz

## COMBAT MINDSET: AN OVERVIEW

As I stated earlier, gunfighting is 95% mental and 5% mechanical. That 95% is the very heart of gunfighting. Combat mindset is mental attitude and mental preparedness that is in evidence well before a confrontation. It is a thought process that has thoroughly envisioned the possibility of a deadly force encounter. It does not involve looking for a fight. In fact it is a mindset which avoids the fight if at all reasonably possible. It incorporates however, a determination to carry through a fight when all other reasonable options have been exhausted.

It would be virtually impossible to instantaneously develop a combat mindset while engaged in a lethal force confrontation, especially if one had never contemplated such thought processes prior to the event. The average gunfight lasts somewhere on the order of 2-3 seconds from the initial shot to the last. There is little or no time to instantaneously mentally resolve oneself within such time constraints if this has not been trained to. Mental preparation must be in place well beforehand.

Mindset drives the fight, and the mechanics simply carry it out. One may be mechanically prepared and yet foul up the entire affair because the mindset just wasn't sufficient. The mechanics of gunfighting and combat mindset are always symbiotic in their relationship. There have been shooters on LAPD that exhibited great skill in combat training courses of fire yet they have turned in sub-par performances in the field. By the same token, there are those shooters that were the average shooters on qualifying and training evolutions who have performed superbly in the field. The difference in performance was due to the combat mindset that these individuals exhibited when placed under critical stress. Naturally, the best combination is a skilled shooter that also possesses a, 'switched on' combat mindset, a very hard combination to beat indeed.

Flying a fighter plane well includes the ability to display a mechanical proficiency in concert with controlled aggression and clarity of thought under stress. This is not at all dissimilar to a gunfight. I have a very good friend, Rich Karwowski, who was a Marine Corps fighter pilot. He drove the FA-18 Hornet (they term it 'driving' the Hornet). He was also an instructor in the FA-18 Hornet. It was not uncommon for him to engage in an ACM (air combat maneuvers) against a much younger and inexperienced fighter pilot student who may have possessed fine mechanical skills. The

student may have performed very well during flight maneuvers, yet would fail during ‘nose-on’ air combat engagements. The student pilot may have been too excited or overly aggressive, and when he overextended himself Rich would defeat him by simply and effectively driving his Hornet and capitalizing on any mistakes which the student pilot made. Others that he flew against might not commit to a course of action or vacillated on a decision and Rich capitalized on their indecision to defeat them as well. There is a fine line that must be drawn in air combat. It is the ability to display a mechanical proficiency in concert with controlled aggression yet possess clarity of thought under extreme duress. This is not at all dissimilar to gunfighting.

Gunfights are very fast and sometimes they can be extremely confusing. Things come at you from all directions and change rapidly. Decisions of how to move, where to move if in fact you even move at all, where to aim, how fast you trigger off shots, what portion of the target you are reliably able to strike, when you can justifiably shoot, what cover you use, when and how you communicate, the background relative to the target, how much you lead a moving target, adapting to lighting conditions, varied shooting positions, adaptation to wounded appendages etc.—all will have to be processed instantaneously. At the same time, you might be fearful, apprehensive, angry, trembling, perhaps short of breath and find the simplest of mental and physical tasks difficult to carry out. All of this is perfectly natural. The primary key in all of this is to first accept some or all of these processes as a natural, human condition. Unless you get into a gunfight each and every day, I would venture to say that each of us will experience some varying degrees of these physiological and psychological reactions when subjected to the stress of a life-or-death situation. I know that I have.

The first step then is to accept the fact that you are after all, human and that you are therefore subject to these human phenomena. We all possess fears of one sort or another. Fear is natural—panic isn’t. This is another fighter pilot axiom. Channeling fear, or turning it in the right direction so that it works for you as opposed to against you, is the key to controlling it. For example, you might think “Okay, you started this, you just tried to kill me, so I’m going to stop it right now!” Or it may simply be the stark realization that if you don’t overcome your fear you are going to be killed or seriously injured, enabling you to override any fear in the way a mother will

instantly override any degree of fear to the immediate protection of her young.

Everyone has varying degrees of fear and trepidation. It's a rather hard thing to quantify just how fearful one might be in any given situation. For instance, I am not at all fond of heights. But I have fast-roped and rappelled from helicopters. I've rappelled from tall buildings and climbed some fairly high rocks and even scaled oil rig platforms in the Pacific in the dead of night. What I've done in each of these instances is to place one hundred per cent of my confidence and trust and focus into the equipment and mechanics of the climbing, fast-roping, or rappelling. For me, this concentration on the mechanics seemed to allay any fear of rapidly accelerating down to an abrupt stop on terra firma. For the shooter, focusing on the mechanics of shooting such as the sights, trigger press, and follow-through—and being acutely focused on the mechanics may very well allay any fears of the moment. Many of my students that have experienced gunfights have stated that they were so focused on solving the problem that they weren't fearful at the time, even though they were shaking afterward. Such a focus will always make for an efficient and professional gunfighter.

I am an ardent fan of the U.S. Space Program. On Apollo 13 when the astronauts experienced a catastrophic failure resulting in an aborted moon landing they had to focus on 'solving the problem.' At one point they had to make a course correction on earth return that would spell either success or disaster for the mission as well as their lives. In just fourteen seconds they had to accomplish this course correction burn with the lunar module attached to the capsule, a procedure which they had never practiced nor anticipated. In candid interviews they expressed an apprehension concerning their fates yet they worked the problem to the best of their ability and trusted in the mechanics of the operation to carry them through—which it did. There was an emotional disconnect that permitted clinical problem-solving. This professionalism is sought out in all astronauts, fighter pilots and trauma surgeons for example. This is the focused mental ability that you, as a shooter, should strive for as well.

In classes and on the range it is not uncommon for some students to shy away from other particular students when we conduct man-on-man drills using reactive armor. I know they're thinking "I can't beat that guy", or "He's just too fast for me." But I always encourage the student to try

anyway. I instruct them to focus purely on the mechanics, and often they perform far better than they believed possible. If they can overcome a relatively low-grade fear such as this, it starts them on a path towards confronting other, higher-grade fears. Rather than succumbing to fear or trepidation, confront it.

The following sections deal with various aspects of combat mindset.

## AGGRESSION

I am not speaking of an uncontrolled aggression, but rather a focused commitment to carry through what needs to be done. Aggression and decisiveness (below) are interdependent. One cannot use half-measures and expect full results. Once you have made a decision to act, it must be straight to the point with everything you've got.

Another way of viewing this would be that of a determined aggression. When I was a very young officer in the streets of Los Angeles I worked Wilshire, one of the 'hot' divisions, as a probationer. I was involved in a number of altercations in my first few months on the job. I rapidly found that trying to subdue a suspect with only 80% effort did nothing but prolong the struggle. When I went at it 'full bore' the suspect stopped his resistance much sooner and with less injury to both parties. Oftentimes, opponents will cease their actions altogether when they realize that the commitment and aggression that they have incited in others is more than what they bargained for. In such situations you must remember that it is the opponent who has chosen to bring the fight to you, or has targeted you as a victim, and therefore you can expect little mercy from them. Also remember that your aggression should be directed as a forceful and mechanically sound process as opposed to an out-of-control and emotionally infused process.

## DECISIVENESS

You cannot waver on a course of action at mid-point in a gunfight. There simply isn't the time for it. For example, let's say you find yourself in a situation where you are carrying a pistol in a concealed manner and your opponent, who poses a possible deadly threat towards you, is unaware of this fact. If you begin to draw the pistol and then suddenly hesitate, you have just given your opponent time to realize that you are armed and what your intent may be. Any initial advantage you had has now reverted back to your opponent. You have lost the advantage over him. It is far better to act on a decision and then follow straight through with it. Of course this does not mean that if you realize that you have made a poor tactical or procedural decision that you should blindly adhere to it rather than change course if the opportunity is afforded. In the example above, it might be better for you to complete the handgun draw to a low ready position rather than abort the draw halfway through it. And in some instances, a course of action may not be the best course of action but it is still preferable to no action at all. And finally, being decisive also means to fully commit to your selected course of action no matter how frightening the situation might be.

## MECHANICAL FOCUS

This refers to concentrating on the mechanics of shooting once you have decided to employ deadly force. You allow the mechanics of shooting to carry you through the action. Align the pistol, press the trigger and incorporate follow-through and let the pistol ‘shoot itself’. This may very well be one of the hardest concepts for a shooter to grasp. Stressful situations involving a threat to life and limb tend to pull your focus towards the threat. This is a natural tendency and condition. While you do have to identify the threat, there must be an emotional disconnect that allows you to revert to pure mechanics once you have decided to act towards that threat.

Emotional disconnect is a clear concept. A trauma surgeon must be extremely emotionally disconnected when making split-second, life-or-death decisions and then carrying out those decisions. They have an amazing ability to compartmentalize mechanical functions despite the severity and chaos they may be dealing with at the moment. Astronauts and fighter pilots work in much the same way. They will continue working the controls as long as it takes, to recover proper flight attitude when things go south. Videos of people that have performed well in actual gunfights clearly demonstrate that a cool, calm, and collected demeanor will usually prevail. Placing emotion, fear and rage etc. into the shots does little towards accomplishing this end. Gunfighting is every bit a forced mechanical focus as well as emotional composure.

## ADAPTABILITY

Bruce Lee said it well. “Water in the cup becomes the cup…water in the teapot becomes the teapot. Become water.” Some gunfights are fairly static and some are not. Tactical situations surrounding the gunfight itself may be static or not. A gunfight might begin in a static setting and then rapidly evolve into a dynamic one and vice versa. The shooter must adapt to whatever occurs. This is one of the more critical yet least understood mental and physical aspects of gunfighting. Applying one set of techniques when an entirely different set is called for will not ensure success. If you drive on a road with intermittent hairpin turns and straight sections, you will brake and speed up accordingly, and so it must be in gunfighting. Knowing when to move quickly and when to slow down is paramount to successfully resolving conflicts.

Many of the shootings that I have studied and subsequently testified about revealed a common mistake: officers would be presented with a fairly complex problem yet they attempted to resolve it as though it were a relatively simple problem. They did not adapt to the situation. For example, a suspect running flat-out at twenty yards perpendicular to the officer in a low level light condition would necessitate leading the target while performing a smooth, measured trigger press, yet the officer might have fired in a manner which was more consistent with a static target at three yards emblazoned with clearly defined scoring rings in bright, ambient light. The results are predictable and generally abysmal. Only by exposing a shooter to varied problems within different settings requiring differing responses will that shooter ever learn to adapt to what is presented to him. This is how we teach, and it is the only way we’ve ever taught or will teach because adaptation is the key lynchpin to success in gunfighting.

## MENTAL PREPARATION

Police officers will often ‘what if’ a situation with their partners, sometimes before and very often after an event. They are learning what went right and what went wrong and deriving lessons from incidents so that performance in the future is improved. Mental preparation helps you better prepare for the future and learn from past mistakes. It is similar to the motorist who carries a variety of emergency equipment in his vehicle at all times, recognizing that you can’t tell when or where things may go wrong or exactly what you will need. It is absolutely imperative that the professional has a mindset that allows a rational and controlled response to critical incidents as opposed to the unprepared and irrational response which will serve no useful purpose. Thinking through potential problems beforehand goes very well towards making rational decisions if and when a situation should confront you.

We debrief many, many shootings in our classes. These are shootings which we have worked on or ones that we have personal and intimate knowledge of. Many lessons are derived from each and every one of them. As with anything else in life we learn what to embrace as tactically and mechanically sound and what to avoid if this is not the case. In retrospect, I can honestly say that I have derived more beneficial lessons from cases on which I have worked than from my own personal experiences. These critical lessons are then imparted first hand to our classes. These lessons are absolutely critical to mentally preparing the shooter for what might confront them in the future. The lessons derived from so many shootings over such a protracted period of time would fill an entire book. Suffice it to say that anything and everything that one can envision and is within reason, has occurred in field shootings. This very fact alone illustrates to our students the level they need to train to and the importance of mental preparation required toward that end.

When watching or reading about shootings, ask yourself what you would do differently or avoid altogether in that particular situation. You need to be brutally honest with your response as well as your personal capabilities. Too often shooters equate speed and excessive ‘whazoo’ techniques as being indicative of a proficient gunfighter. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is problem solving and a smoothness of action

coupled with technical proficiency which often carries the day. Studying past incidents will go a long way towards illustrating this point.

## AWARENESS

The military uses a DEFCON, (Defensive Condition) strategy to codify different levels of awareness. The late Col. Jeff Cooper also associated a color code with relationship to threat awareness. It was broken down into the following; white, yellow, orange, red and black. It is an excellent method of approaching the subject of awareness.

**White** - Unaware of your surroundings.

**Yellow** - Aware of your surroundings with no specific threat identification

**Orange** - Aware of a potential threat

**Red** - Threat identified—threat response initiated

**Black** - Actual fight

The simple awareness of a developing situation is worth more than all the technique in the world. It has been stated that sheep have two settings: graze and stampede. Getting caught behind the power curve is not the way to go through a gunfight. Those who have been in gunfights and 'never saw it coming' have had a much harder time prevailing than those who were aware of what was taking place around them and responded accordingly. I would venture to say that most of the good guys that die in gunfights were unaware of what was truly occurring until it was far too late. They did not 'ping' on telltale indicators that a deadly threat was approaching.

One shooting I am familiar with illustrates how situations can escalate— rapidly. Two officers picked up a prostitute who agreed to turn in a small-time dope dealer in hopes of reducing a narcotics possession charge against her. They handcuffed her, placed her in the back of their black-and-white, and proceeded to the suspect's location. The officers walked up to the second floor of a seedy hotel located off a main boulevard and knocked on the door. Window blinds were pulled apart and they heard a female voice say from inside, "Oh, damn…it's the cops." Apparently both officers kept their guns holstered as they knocked on the door again. They heard movement inside the room and finally the door slowly opened, but they couldn't see who was opening it—presumably the female opened the door while hiding behind it. The officers were apparently still holstered. Both officers observed a male lying on a bed some ten feet inside the room—a man was lying face down, without a shirt with both hands under his chest with his head raised toward the officers as he looked directly at them. The officers were still

holstered. Suddenly the man drew a pistol from beneath his chest and fired at the officers, striking one of them in the arm and head just as the officer began to draw his sidearm. The officer instantly went down. The second officer was shot once in his protective vest and once through his hand and arm as he simultaneously drew his pistol and backed out of the doorway while returning fire. When this shooting was debriefed, many officers questioned the fact that all the dangers signs pointed to a potential problem and yet the officers did not pick up on it.

Now, I was not physically there on scene so I don't know exactly what the officer's thought processes were. There are many, many other actual examples however where perhaps certain danger signs which might have been picked up, were not. When I was a very young officer I worked with extremely experienced training officers. They would constantly observe things on the streets that I did not. I was astonished at what they observed and picked up on simply due to the fact that I myself had not yet developed these skills. Years later, if I trained a younger, less experienced officer I would be the one picking up on telltale indicators and they in turn, were now learning from me. If I can learn this situational awareness, then so can you.

For some individuals, it might take some time to become more acutely aware of your surroundings as you go about your day as you have not yet practiced this. This is perfectly normal yet with relatively nominal effort, you will find that this is a readily acquired skill set.

**Emotional Instincts**

We have evolved as a species into what some would consider an enlightened life form. Modern man is not always at war, and in many parts of the world he will never experience violence firsthand. In a perfect world this would be just fine, but as we all know ours is not a perfect world. Many victims of violent crimes have stated that they knew there was a developing problem, stating that they could ‘feel’ it coming, yet they ignored their ‘emotional instincts’ and subsequently became victims. Other victims never saw anything coming even though afterwards an in-depth debriefing showed that danger signs were evident and should have been recognized well ahead of time. I’ve personally interviewed such victims many times over the years. Other victims have clearly observed evidence of a potential problem yet chose to ignore it altogether. A classic example of the latter occurred in Southern California in the early 1980’s. Customers inside a McDonald’s restaurant observed a man in the parking lot standing beside a pickup truck loading ammunition into weapons and placing them in his waistband and then obtaining more firearms from the pickup truck and walking toward them. Yet the customers continued to sit and simply stare at him, as if they were watching a bad movie but couldn’t walk out of the theater. The gunman entered the restaurant, where he killed and wounded many patrons. Simply walking out the opposite door would have saved them, yet they chose to ignore clear evidence of a developing dangerous situation. Pay attention to your ‘emotional instincts’, which are generally reliable. If you feel something is wrong, it probably is.

## THE OODA LOOP

OODA is an acronym for observe, orient, decide, act. The OODA Loop is a fairly common and simple approach to resolving tactical situations. You first observe the surroundings and the problem, then you physically orient yourself with respect to the problem (which might mean simply getting out of harm's way for the time being), then you decide on a course of action, and then you act to implement your decisions. This "loop" will continually change and evolve to adapt to the problem until the problem is resolved. It is the essence of gunfighting. The mind processes and decides based on sensory inputs and then the body physically carries out what the mind has just processed.

# CROSS TRAINING WITH SPECIAL OPERATIONS



Training with Task Force 160 (Nightstalkers) Hughes 500 “Little Bird.” This is Scott’s gun and rocket run. 7.62 Mini-gun mounted over port skids.



Getting to fly the Hughes 500. I fired 2.75 inch Zuni Rockets and the Mini-gun on gun runs.



Training with ST 6 and TF 160. (On LAPD’s dime.)



Training with Naval Special Warfare.

# LA RIOTS 1992



L.A. Riots. Location is typical of what we fought in and around at night when burning. I am on the far right.



Aftermath of LA riots. Devastation in some areas was total.



End of LA riot deployment. Metro Division.

# SECTION VIII
# PRACTICE

“No one ever made it to Carnegie Hall on a whim”
— Brett McQueen

## DRY PRACTICE EXERCISES

There is live fire and there is dry practice (not dry fire.) Dry practice means that there are no rounds in the pistol or in the magazine and in fact, there aren't any live rounds anywhere in the vicinity. If you think this is overdoing it then consider the fact that quite a number of shooters have discharged rounds from what they 'thought' was a dry or unloaded pistol. Make sure that it is in fact—unloaded. Dry practice is perhaps the best way to really get a feel for loading and unloading the pistol, the draw to a pressed trigger and the reloading sequences. Too many shooters attempt to become better shooters using live fire only. The problem is that if the trigger is not pressed properly or jerked, the onset of recoil is so instantaneous that it masks the fact that you did in fact, jerk the trigger. Within a dry practice setting, if the trigger is jerked, the muzzle will invariably dip down. Using snap caps (inert and non-firing rounds) will enable you to perform reloads and if you are worried about damaging the firing pin then this will alleviate that potential problem altogether.

A good dry practice drill is to pick an object of some size and dimension and then draw to it and press the trigger and hold your follow-through after the hammer falls. The object of the drill is to get the muzzle to remain as static as is humanly possible when the hammer falls. If you want to press off pairs, then use the firing support thumb to thumb cock the hammer after the first dry press in a fast sweeping motion and then realign the sights and repeat the dry shot. On pistols such as the Glock, simply cycle the slide with the firing support hand to accomplish a second dry practice shot. When you have done this to satisfaction pick a smaller object to concentrate the sights on and so forth until the object represents a standard silhouette at say, fifty yards. Many years ago as a young officer, I made a series of six small silhouettes from cardboard stock of varying sizes that corresponded to targets at fifteen yards distance all the way back to fifty yards. I spray painted them flat black and glued them on the inside of the garage wall. Standing back at ten feet, I would vary the speed of my dry shots according to the size of the target I had chosen to dry practice on. It worked very well to establish my feel for the trigger and forced my concentration beyond that which I normally experienced absent the effects of recoil and the sound of a discharged round. If I came off of my follow-

through too quickly I recognized it immediately and correspondingly, if I jumped on the trigger, I recognized that as well.

An excellent drill is to dry practice while on the range. Dry practice an upcoming live fire sequence several times and then load the pistol and fire the live fire sequence one time only. Repeat this for every stage of say, a standard qualification course of fire. You may be surprised at the quality of your shots as opposed to just firing through the qualification course with no dry practice whatsoever. When we run classes over multiple days, students will often ask what they can do to improve their shooting. When I explain dry practice to them in great detail, they leave the range, conduct dry practice and return the following day exhibiting a marked improvement in their overall performance. Contrary to what many say, dry practice will not destroy the pistol. Have an armorer periodically check the pistol to ensure that nothing is in danger of failing if you're concerned regarding this subject. The tragic irony is that many shooters forgo dry practice to, 'protect' the pistol. This is done at the high cost of not developing a skill that may very well save their lives. You have a pretty pistol but lack any real skill. Lee Marvin said it best, "they look pretty but can they fight?" Reloads along with loading and unloading drills, can be practiced until they seem second nature with dummy rounds. Nothing but good will, come from dry practice.

By now you are starting to become familiar with your pistol. You know how it feels or should feel in your hands when held properly. You have a 'feel' for the trigger and when it breaks and know how much slack is in the trigger and how to eliminate it. You have a greater comprehension of sight alignment and sight picture. You are now hitting the surface controls with confidence and consistency. In essence you and the pistol are become one, rather than two disparate objects attempting to work together. You have developed a 'feel' for the pistol and how it 'points' and sets in the hand and you can possibly determine whether or not it is fully loaded or unloaded simply by its weight. The stocks and the frontstrap and backstrap of the pistol are becoming worn from repeated drills and your hands are developing calluses and wear patterns. There is a supreme confidence in this. It is the confidence that you can accomplish what you need to with the pistol and with a degree of reliability. You can hit what you need to within reason and you are beginning to establish your own personal limits with the pistol. At this point you have developed a solid base to build upon with confidence.

I seldom allow students to change pistols during the course of a class unless unusual circumstances arise. Too many times an individual will transition from one style of pistol to another and then another and he or she spends all of their time trying to re-learn new skill sets unique to that particular pistol. The shooter is constantly working with a new pistol system yet again - and the basics seem to fall off. His learning curve is not as great as that of the other students. He would be far better off staying with one pistol, learning it intimately - mastering the basics - and then moving on. He should practice with one pistol first and learn it well and then move on to the others if he finds it necessary. At that point what he has mastered relative to one pistol can be readily translated into another model with minor adjustments.

## LIVE FIRE EXERCISES

If you've practiced the shooting basics enough to be safe and proficient, you can start moving farther along in your training. Eventually you will reach the point where the simple motion of coming out of the holster and then onto target and then pressing off a shot or shots, or simply drawing to the low ready, seems second nature. Of course it's not second nature; you have learned a skill through repetition and refinement. The following drills will help you reach this level of skill and become intimately familiar with your pistol.

**Low ready, raise to target, fire**

Practice coming up from the low ready position and firing a single shot so that it becomes one, fluid process. Designate a target area and work this drill until you can realize ten hits for ten separate shots at a specified distance and within a specific time frame and within a limited target area. Increase the distance by a few yards and then rework the drill again until you accomplish the same results. A good target area would be the 9-10 rings on a standard human silhouette target. Conduct this drill from the three yard back to a thirty yard distance. Then repeat the drill firing two shots or pairs in the exact same manner. When you have successfully done this and done it consistently time after time, you're ready to move on.

**Draw to low ready, raise to target, fire**

Start out with a single, smooth uninterrupted draw stroke from the holster to low ready and then raised directly onto target. Make single shots. The goal should be to break the shot the instant that the pistol is on target and when the sights are aligned on the target. The draw to low ready remains at the same speed as does raising the pistol onto the target. The difference in time (to press off accurate shots) will derive from the increased distance to the target. Remember — focus is on the sights, trigger slack removed, press the trigger and incorporate follow through. Work toward accomplishing the sight alignment, trigger press and follow-through simultaneously in one single fluid motion. Work the drill again from the three-yard line back to the thirty-yard line. As the distance increases, the time required for the drill should increase by only enough time to maintain proper sight alignment and sight picture as you conduct the trigger press and incorporate follow-through. Work ten shots at each distance while striving for consistency and smooth, straight lines in every aspect of the draw to low ready, the alignment

on target, the sight focus, the trigger press and follow-through. Do not rush this procedure. Critically analyze each and every aspect and work towards cleaner lines and ‘fluidity’ in all of these procedures. Finally, repeat the process with two shots for every draw stroke.

**Draw directly to target, fire**

The next drill is to come directly from the holster to directly onto the target and fire a single shot. The pistol ascribes a straight, angular line from position two of the draw to a vector directly onto the target. There is a reason for the two distinctively different drills. As mentioned previously, if all one does is to practice to draw directly onto target and nothing else then you are setting yourself up for an unrealistic and possibly tragic response in the field. Any officer with a fair amount of time on the job will tell you that he draws to a low ready position without ever firing a shot far more times than he ever draws directly onto a target and fires which is a very, very rare occurrence. In many instances the manner and efficiency that is displayed by a professional when drawing to low ready is enough to stop a suspect’s actions altogether. If the situation requires going directly to aiming at the threat, then you are preparing for this as well with this drill. You now have two options as opposed to one, depending on the situation.

When you practice drawing directly onto the target from the holster, strive for the straight clean lines in any and all physical motions. Think of it this way; straight is smooth and smooth is fast. Shorter lines are more effective than longer ones. Again, start with single shots from the three-yard position all the way back to the thirty-yard position. Then repeat the drills firing two shots per cycle.

**Increasing the speed**

Work next from the three-yard line and start pushing your times from both the low ready position and from the holstered position. Step back at varied distances and strive to balance your speed with combat accuracy. This is where it is not only challenging, but practical as well. While it may be true that many gunfights occur inside the closer distances you might very well find yourself as the exception to this rule. In our advanced classes we even have students hitting standard targets out to 250 yards with the pistol. While this is well beyond the range of the average gunfight, it is a good skill to possess, and it certainly instills confidence in what you can accomplish at normal ranges. What you are striving for in all cases is to break the shots

before an opponent can react to your actions. Many times when I am ‘racing’ the pistol, going as fast as I can without making mistakes, I will freeze the instant a shot is fired. From here I check to ensure that the lines I used were clean and my focus was where it should be. This is a very good way to develop a feel for the entire process. If you suspect sloppiness or the shots start to stray, then back off on your speed until both are brought back under control and continue on from there.

Start next with firing singles, then triples, then pairs and perhaps singles again ensuring all the while that your accuracy stays balanced with your speed. Vary the number of shots at any and all distances. Don’t assume a defined pattern or number of shots at any distance. Remain flexible and be adaptable. Again, if your shots start to stray outside a given area bleed off some speed. If they are too closely grouped together then open up the throttle. What you are doing by conducting these drills is preventing yourself from falling into the trap of only firing one round, or only two, etc. as a standard response at any given distance. No one can foresee in advance how many rounds will be required to stop a given threat. Remember—gunfighting is pure adaptation while under extreme duress and one must constantly adapt to the situation. Your training needs to reflect this fact.

**Head shots**

For a number of reasons, the head shot is one of the more difficult to pull off in the field. Most criminals have a tremendous instinct for self preservation. They survive by their instincts and their reaction to the things that can harm them. They prey on those they sense are weaker. This is at the very core of their criminal nature. It is also their nature to react a lot faster than you would believe possible. The combination of these two factors—self-preservation and reaction speed—are one of the reasons that hits on criminals in the field are never as accurate as those on static targets. Criminals observe what you are doing and react very, very quickly, and often in unpredictable ways. An example I have often used is boxing. You have two superbly conditioned athletes with incredible hand speed who are often only an arm’s length away from one another. A punch is thrown at lightning speed but the head that it was aimed at disappears just as quickly as the punch is thrown. This can also occur in a gunfight. It has happened to me. Just as the pistol is brought to bear and the suspect realizes what is about to happen, his head disappears.

Another factor that comes into play is that you are not merely attempting a head shot but rather a brain shot. From the side this is less difficult. From a frontal perspective it presents challenges. The area that one ideally shoots into from a frontal position is either within the eye area or slightly above them. The eye sockets are concave and this tends to ‘channel’ the round into the brain. It is not a foolproof firing solution, as nothing ever is, yet it increases your chances of success. There are many documented cases of suspects sustaining facial hits yet continuing to fight and this is true even with rifle rounds. Peripheral hits also can do strange things. There is a lot of lubricity between the scalp and the skull, and in some instances rounds have merely deflected off the skull, or have even stayed within the area between the scalp and skull and simply coursed around and around the skull until they depleted their energy. A brain shot in concert with extremely fast reaction time on behalf of the suspect can be extremely demanding and difficult to pull off in the field.

For the head shot drills, start by slowly placing shot after shot on top of one another in a very specific area in the center of the target between the eyes. Work this drill from three yards then four and then five all the way back to ten yards. In the real world, a ten yard head shot can be an extremely demanding shot indeed. I tell students that you want to make this more akin to a sniper shot but one that is accomplished with a pistol, and sometimes this must be conducted at speed. When your consistency is dialed in, repeat the distances but add more and more speed yet maintain that tight group. This drill will demand all your concentration to pull it off successfully. The mental concentration required for these demanding shots will translate directly into a better mechanical performance of those less demanding shots which in turn, makes for a much more practiced and overall proficient shooter. Practice these single head shots only;

- Head shot from the low ready position.
- Head shot drawing directly from the holster.
- Head shot wherein the sights are brought to bear on the head and the shot is setup, then hold for a number of seconds and then suddenly break the shot.

**“Failure Drills”**

An excellent follow-up drill is to now combine the center mass shots with a head shot. Think again of boxing. The boxers will oftentimes use

body shots to slow down an opponent and then follow up with a knockout head punch. Pistol fighting can be very much the same. A body hit may only stun or slow down the opponent, which can allow a more precise shot placement, if necessary, into the head. The head shot is what I refer to as an 'anchoring' shot which definitively ends the fights once and for all. This is sometimes referred to as a failure drill as the body shots failed to stop the threat. There should be a definite pacing of the shots depending on the distance to the target and the size of the target afforded to the shooter. This pacing will also be predicated on the skill of the shooter. In general, the body shots will be much faster than the head shots due to the larger target area. This is not to say that one takes all the time in the world for the head shot, however; it must always be precise yet timely. Traditionally, this drill consists of two shots center mass and then one shot to the head. However, I vary this drill to deliberately stay 'out of the box'. Sometimes it may be one center and then one head or, five shots to center mass and one to the head or perhaps three center one head, etc. Again this forces you away from unrealistic expectations within field settings.

**Two targets**

The next drill is to work on two targets spaced anywhere from three to ten feet apart. I personally prefer them spaced at the greater distance (target to target) as they challenge me more, but three feet target to target distance is a good starting point. Begin by firing one shot center mass on one target and one shot center mass on the other target from the low ready. Then proceed to two shots on both targets always watching for the balance between speed and accuracy. Next, start from the holster and draw directly onto the target with single shots to either target, then move to two shots and perhaps even three shots to either target. Keep the distance within seven yards while you start pushing yourself on speed. If the accuracy falls off, then rein in the speed. When accuracy returns, slowly increase the speed. This may not come easily, so be very patient. Throughout your shooting career you will always be balancing speed with accuracy at any given distance and with varying targets and problems which might be presented to you. If you think about it, this really is the essence of gunfighting—to hit fast yet accurately on any given target when it really counts and to do so on demand.

It is noteworthy that many shooters will shoot a specified course of fire and stay right at preset time limits when they could actually shoot within these time frames. As a point of fact - there has never been a preset time for the duration of a gunfight. Gunfights create their own time durations based on the circumstances. Preset time limits are always arbitrarily based on an individual or an entity's notion that 'such and such' a time limit is what will be presented in the field. How anyone could ever determine this time allotment accurately is beyond me. Simply train to press off shots as quickly as you can in any given situation but ONLY when you can do so accurately! In a gunfight, an opponent won't be cognizant of the difference between one or two seconds or fractions thereof in the spacing of your shots, but he will always be affected by the hits.

# BRETT'S BACKGROUND

## MY PERSONAL JOURNEY

The question that I am most often asked when meeting people for the first time is how I came to start a firearms training business since I have never been in law enforcement. The truth is, it was purely by accident.

I grew up in the Midwest in a family that did not own guns aside from an old hunting shotgun that my dad had stored away in the attic. My friends' parents didn't own guns as far as I could tell, but then it wasn't a subject that came up in conversation. In my experience as a child, guns were something that policemen and cowboys used. I have an early photo of myself at age 5 or 6 wearing a holster and a toy six-shooter with the gun pointed directly into the camera. Was it a foreshadowing of what my future would bring? Maybe, but more likely it was influenced by watching old westerns with my brother. He was older and bigger and got to decide what shows we would watch on TV. It was always an old western. Despite not being my first choice in programming, I have to admit that watching John Wayne ride out after a bad guy was pretty exciting. This is all part of our colorful history.

We live in a culture replete with old west heroes and frontier values. I used to ask my brother how to tell the good guys from the bad and he said, "the good guys wear the white hats". Fast forward many years and the six-shooter is replaced by a semi auto and the white hat has been replaced by a badge. We are hooked on cop shows because we still want to believe that in the end, bad guys are taken off the streets and justice is served. But this is often not the case in real life. The police are often under-staffed and over-worked. Many of us feel the need to protect our homes and our families. The bad guys don't wear black hats any more. The lines are blurred. Police officers may not be around when we most need them to be—in an earthquake, a riot, a flood. We have seen examples of all these things in the last several years.

Gun ownership has become stigmatized by some and has had a polarizing effect on American politics. It has divided our country into the have and have nots—those who have guns, those who do not and even those who are 'offended' by them. In my experience, those who are most 'offended' by guns have little or no experience with them. They are speaking from a purely political point of view—"all guns are bad and only certain kinds of people own guns". I can tell you with absolute certainty that one

cannot put all gun owners into the same category—politically, socially or economically. We have trained many politically “liberal” individuals who keep a gun in their home (sometimes many guns) for personal protection.

I never gave much thought to gun ownership as a young adult. I moved from the Midwest to attend U.C.L.A. where I got my degree in Political Science. After graduation I went on to business school to get my M.B.A. Not long after, I married a physician, started a my own business and had a family. I lived in a ‘safe’ neighborhood on the west side of Los Angeles and never gave my security or that of my family a second thought. That is until the ‘follow home’ robberies started in my neighborhood in the late 80s.

Several years ago there were a series of crimes being committed by a ‘crew’ of career criminals. These criminals would target people on the road and follow them into their garages where they would attack their victims and rob their homes. I happened to be living down the street where one such robbery took place. At this time I was a single parent living alone with two young sons. My home had been burglarized twice in a year, possibly by some workmen who had done some work in my home. I put in an alarm system but the “Follow Home” robberies continued, even in the homes that had security systems. I was losing sleep worrying about the safety of my family. This is what prompted me to buy a gun.

As a complete novice, buying a gun and learning how to use it was a sobering experience. I knew nothing about guns, nor did most of my friends. I went to a gun store and was told to buy a .38 revolver because it was “easy to use and didn’t malfunction like the semi automatic handguns”. I did some research and wasn’t convinced this was my best choice for personal protection. I had met Scott through the LAPD and asked his advice on what kind of gun to buy. He suggested that I try out different handguns, so he took me to the range and let me try out his S & W 4506, his Colt .45 and his revolver. I liked them all and surprisingly, enjoyed shooting. It was empowering and gave me a feeling of confidence. The next step was to get some solid training.

I signed up for a five-day ‘basic’ Handgun course at a reputable shooting school. I brought a Smith & Wesson 4506 with me to use for the course. (At this point I barely knew how to load a magazine no less how to do speed reloads or malfunction drills). Everything was new to me and I was

still intimidated by my pistol. On the first day of class I learned that I was at a huge disadvantage. Not only was I the only woman in the class, but all of the other students were very comfortable with their handguns and already pretty good shots. Some of the ‘students’ were also firearms instructors!! The guy to my left was a firearms instructor for the military and the one to my right was an operator for some undisclosed government agency. During the breaks the other students were kind enough to show me how to load my magazines and use my de-cocking lever. I didn’t even know the difference between a double action and single action pistol!! If the magazine was removed from my pistol, was it still loaded? All these questions went unanswered in the class and I quickly realized that this was NOT a basic class in the true sense of the word. Basic to me meant “take the gun out of the box and hand it to the instructor.” (This experience later prompted me to want to teach the basics to civilians who had little to no background with firearms.)

Suffice it to say that it was a real struggle for me to get through the five days with my limited knowledge. By the middle of the week I was using the instructor’s brand new 9mm Glock pistol instead of the large-framed 4506 which was too big for my hand. Every finger on my firing hand was bandaged—every fingernail broken and I had to keep replacing the bandage where I got my hand caught between the hood of the barrel and the breech face of the slide, trying to unload my gun. This class that I thought would be easy turned out to be a real challenge for me. Just getting over the ‘intimidation’ factor was a long process. Once I understood that I was in control of the gun and not the other way around, I got comfortable with it.

After this experience I attended several other schools with some great instructors. With each class I became more confident and more familiar with firearms. I took handgun, shotgun and rifle classes. What I learned during that time made me realize how much practice and training it took to get proficient with firearms.

**Women and Guns**

Today approximately 12% of police officers and 20% of military personnel are women and that number is growing. As the number of women entering the field of law enforcement and the military has grown, some forward-thinking agencies have learned how to adapt to training females.

In the past, training for women in general had its challenges. Gun stores were selling revolvers to women instead of semi automatic pistols because the revolvers were “easier” to operate, according to the salesmen. Police and military firearms trainers were perplexed as to why they were having difficulty teaching firearms to women using the same old techniques that had worked for years in a predominately male populated class. When women started entering the field of law enforcement and the military in greater numbers a whole new set of challenges were presented to police and government agencies. While these agencies required use of the same firearms for men and women, they did not take into consideration several factors. In most cases, women had smaller hands, did not have the same upper body strength and often times had little or no experience with firearms, unlike their male counterparts. But the biggest challenge, in my opinion, was the intimidation factor. Firearms can be very intimidating to those who have not had experience with them.

Over the past twenty years I have received many phone calls from police trainers asking my advice on how to teach women to shoot, and I have worked with many women who had difficulties qualifying for the firearms portion of their jobs. The calls would often go like this: “We have this female agent/officer who is doing an outstanding job but just can’t qualify in the firearms course. She is about to get fired unless we can turn her around.” So they would send this woman to me and we would sit down and talk before we ever started shooting. Women are generally good communicators and often times they just needed someone to listen to their concerns and fears. The one comment that I would hear over and over was that the firearms trainers for their agency were condescending towards them and in some cases, abusive. So we would talk about our experiences and I would have them ask me questions that they might not have been comfortable addressing in a predominantly male-populated class. Then we would very slowly start with basic manipulation and some dry practice. Once she was comfortable with that phase, we would move on to live, slow fire. We started out slowly at each phase, finding a comfort zone. This worked time and time again. Eventually they would not only qualify at the next qualification course, but that they were getting scores in the 90s and beating out some of the men who had made fun of them. Most importantly, they were learning a skill that might someday save their lives or those of others. This is when I

realized that there was a genuine need for patient and thoughtful firearms training, not only for women but for all novices.

I have trained women from all walks of life—professors, physicians, attorneys, forensic psychologists, D.A.s, engineers, scientists, teachers, principals, soccer moms, federal agents, police officers, mystery writers, etc. Some of these women have been victims of violent crimes, rape, home invasions, stalking, peeping Toms, follow homes—every type of crime one can imagine. Often times they feel vulnerable and defenseless. Some women have taken out restraining orders on former boyfriends or husbands out of fear and frustration and others are concerned about the increasing crime in their neighborhoods. What I hear over and over again is a feeling of hopelessness from women who have been victimized. Many times no one will take their complaints seriously and it has led to devastating consequences.

Whatever their reasons for training with us, women leave the class feeling that they have choices and can take control over their own lives. This can be a very empowering feeling. I have seen more than a few metamorphoses take place not only in attitude but in physical appearance. Some women will come to a class feeling defeated and scared or just afraid of the gun that they have in the house. When they leave, they are standing taller and feeling more confident. While firearms are not for everyone, for those who choose to own a gun for personal protection, it can be a very liberating experience.

Years ago I had a student, let’s call her Shelly, who was constantly harassed by Ted, a former boyfriend who had been employed at the same TV station where they worked. He called her repeatedly, followed her around at work, followed her to social events and kept watch over her at night by sitting in his car outside her house. She tried everything to get rid of him. She changed her phone number, her job and finally moved to another home. He nonetheless found out where she lived a few months later. Shelly got a restraining order against Ted, which angered him even more. He felt a sense of entitlement. Ted continued to harass her, completely ignoring the restraining order, which is very common in cases like this. She went to the police again and they told her there was not much they could do until he committed a crime. And that is the sad truth. In many metropolitan areas, the police are so overburdened with work they often don’t have the resources to

pursue a stalker or provide protection against a stalker. And sometimes they don't even take it seriously.

One night, upon returning home late, Shelly found Ted hiding in the bushes in front of her house. He grabbed her and threatened to kill her. She managed to get away and call the police. He was soon arrested and went to prison for a short time. That's when Shelly came to us for training. She feared that this guy, who was getting out of prison soon, would come back and kill her. Shelly wanted to take back her life. She went through several classes with us, bought a gun, practiced at a gun range on a regular basis and mentally prepared herself for the possibility that her situation could get worse. It did.

A few months after Shelly started training with us, she returned to her home after work and sensed that someone was in her house. It was too late to retreat, but not too late for her to remove her .45 semi auto from the drawer. As she started towards the back door of her house, Ted appeared and advanced towards her with a butcher knife, telling her that it was time for her to die. She presented her gun and told him in no uncertain terms, to get out. He hesitated for a moment and then realizing that she was prepared to use the gun, ran out, shouting obscenities at her. He was picked up a few blocks away by the police and this time he went to prison for a very long time. Sometimes after exhausting every other option available, buying a gun is the best solution, even for someone who was not a gun enthusiast initially. Shelly was prepared for the worst, trained for it and had the proper mindset to follow through. She most likely saved her own life.

Shelly's situation is by no means unique and it doesn't just happen to women who are careless or unaware of their surroundings. Over the last several years I have heard hundreds of stories like Shelly's from intelligent, well-educated women who have had their lives turned upside down because they have been victims of these kinds of predators. While there is no foolproof way to protect oneself from becoming a victim, avoiding situations that could be problematic is always the best solution. My advice to women is if it *feels* uncomfortable, trust your instincts and avoid people or situations in which you can become compromised.

The same holds true for men. There is no shame in avoiding situations which might lead to trouble. Walking away from a potential problem is perhaps the most prudent approach especially when firearms are

involved. Whatever your reasons for buying a firearm, be absolutely certain that you understand the responsibilities and the legal aspects that go along with gun ownership.

# EPILOGUE

When I ‘pulled the pin’ and retired in 2006 I had experienced a very full career. I had worked hard and had gained entry into the most elite units in the LAPD. I had given much of myself to the LAPD and she in turn, had given much to me but it was not without frustration at times. I have bonds and friendships with past partners which will never be broken. I have many lifetime memories which I will never forget as well. As with anything in life there are mixed feelings about never hitting the streets again or rolling on a SWAT call up but at least I had experienced what few others ever had. When Brett organized my retirement at the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles, the turnout was overwhelming and at the same time, very humbling. As she and I drove back home through quite streets I reflected on all that I had accomplished and was now leaving. The only way to describe the feeling was as if I had been standing behind a set of jet engines all day and then…they were suddenly turned off. I still continue to interact with the Department on varying levels but most of our time now is devoted to teaching others what we have learned and there is a supreme satisfaction in all of this. Regarding my career overall; in the words of film director Sam Peckinpah “I could walk through the door feeling justified.” This is very much how I feel, to this very day. To all those we have known—thank you. To those we will meet in the future, we look forward to meeting you.

**ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT GUNFIGHTING IS 95% MENTAL AND 5% MECHANICAL.**

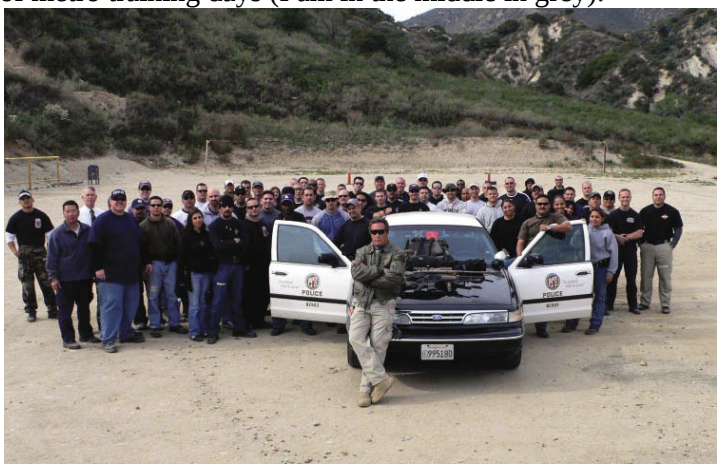


First and Last official LAPD photo.

# END OF WATCH



The last of hundreds of metro training days (I am in the middle in grey).



Last Divisional training day—Shootin’ Newton Division.